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# **Negotiating Gender Identity, Motherhood and Consumption: Examining the Experiences of South Asian Women in the UK**

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Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of The Open University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Marketing

**Department of Strategy and Marketing**

**The Open University Business School**

June 2017

# Abstract

This exploratory study aims to understand the role of consumption for South Asian mothers living in the UK as they incorporate motherhood into their gender identities. Consumer research on motherhood suggests mothers' consumption practices are intertwined with the dominant norms of good mothering that pervade many cultures, known as intensive mothering. To fulfil the norms of intensive mothering, mothers are expected to consume appropriately and devote intense amounts of effort to ensuring their child's development, both during the transition to motherhood and beyond. However much of this research focusses predominantly on white, middle-class mothers. Relatively little is known about the consumption practices of mothers at other intersecting positions in society, such as ethnic minority women. Yet recent sociological research suggests that increasing numbers of South Asian women are transforming gender norms surrounding education, work and marriage as they negotiate access to university. This thesis seeks to understand the complex ways in which South Asian women negotiate new gender identities on becoming mothers, and the role of consumption in this process.

In-depth interviews with 23 South Asian mothers living in the UK were used to gain insight into participants' lived experiences of becoming a mother and their everyday mothering and consumption practices. The findings show that during the transition to motherhood, there were two ways in which participants' accounts of consuming appropriately differed from that shown in existing consumer research. First, participants typically embraced certain South Asian cultural practices surrounding birth, which meant that participants often delayed purchasing baby products until after birth. Second, participants' consumption of expert advice was more complex, due to the higher status of advice from female family members within family hierarchies. Beyond the transition to motherhood, mothering and consumption practices such as housework, parenting, feeding the family, and childcare consumption are key sites in which many participants negotiate the norms of intensive mothering as they pursue a more egalitarian division of these responsibilities on returning to work/study.

The thesis contributes to consumer research on gender identity by how participants are positioned to challenge gender norms through their consumption practices. Participants regard motherhood as an opportunity to reflect on how they socialise their children; they develop new ways of transmitting elements of their cultural and religious heritage to their children. Rather than simply coping with these additional responsibilities, participants often view motherhood as an opportunity to socialise their children with more egalitarian gender norms.

## Acknowledgements

There are many people who have helped me on my journey to complete this thesis, and I would like thank them all, starting with all those who encouraged me to pursue my goal of gaining a PhD.

I am forever grateful for the help and encouragement of my supervisors, Dr Andrew Lindridge and Professor Sally Dibb. I could not have asked for better supervisors, and their guidance and support has been invaluable in helping me to bring this project to fruition.

I would also like to thank my husband, Ben, for all his support, patience and faith in me. Being able to share and talk problems through has given me the strength to achieve my aims, and I am truly grateful for all his advice and reassurance. To my parents and close family members, thank you for the many forms of support that you have offered me throughout my academic life so far. I will always value the love and inspiration of my daughters, Emma and Olivia, who have not only fuelled my interest in motherhood and consumption, but have been a wonderful source of escape from the thesis at times!

I am grateful for the funding and support provided by the Open University Business School, and I have enjoyed the company and feedback from fellow students and staff that I have met during my time at the Open University.

Finally, I would like to thank all the women who took part in this research. Thank you for opening up your lives to me. I feel honoured to have had the opportunity to share your stories and experiences as part of your journeys through motherhood.

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# **Chapter 1      Introduction**

This chapter outlines the aims and focus of the research, as well as providing an overview of the thesis structure. Section 1.1 discusses the rationale for the study, offering a brief explanation of the focus of the thesis. Section 1.2 offers a discussion of the wider purpose of the study, in relation to understanding motherhood and consumption, and the importance of examining South Asian women's experiences in particular. Section 1.3 presents the research aims and questions, while section 1.4 outlines the structure of the thesis.

## **1.1 Rationale of the study**

This thesis presents an exploratory study that aims to understand the role that consumption plays for South Asian women living in the UK<sup>1</sup> as they incorporate motherhood into their gender identities. The research is a qualitative, interpretive study of the lived experiences of South Asian mothers. The study contributes to existing consumer research by examining how South Asian women's negotiation of new gender identities, through their mothering and consumption practices, can both reproduce and challenge gender norms.

The thesis takes as its starting point the negotiation of new gender identities through consumption practices for South Asian mothers. Consumption practices refer to the various actions or ways in which people consume various consumption objects, including products, services and experiences (Arnould and Price 1993; Holt 1995). Examples of consumption practices that are particularly relevant to this thesis include shopping, cooking, cleaning, and arranging childcare, since these consumption practices are often associated with motherhood (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Miller 1998; Thompson 1996). Other relevant

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<sup>1</sup> For brevity's sake, the thesis will typically use the phrase 'South Asian women', with the understanding that this means South Asian women living in the UK, unless otherwise stated.

consumption practices may include consuming information and advice from parenting websites and books (Kehily 2014; Miller 2005), or using mobile phone apps to track pregnancy or child development, for example.

Motherhood is an important site or context to examine how women negotiate their gender identities through consumption practices (O'Donohoe et al. 2014; Voice Group 2010b). This thesis uses the term consumption site to refer to a context in which individuals negotiate their identities through multiple consumption practices (Valentine 1999). The notion of consumption site can be used broadly, for example the family (Caruana and Chatzidakis 2014), as well as being used more specifically, such as feeding the family (DeVault 1992; Moisio et al. 2004; O'Malley and Prothero 2006) or transitional mothers (Kehily and Thomson 2009). In this thesis, motherhood is regarded as a site or context to examine how South Asian women negotiate their gender identity negotiation through consumption practices, during both the transition to motherhood and through everyday mothering practices.

Although more women are accessing higher education and entering the workforce, when they become mothers they encounter powerful norms surrounding good motherhood (Hays 1996). For example, the norms of intensive motherhood shape women's understanding of how to be a good mother, and pervade many cultures (Cappellini and Yen 2016; Erdirishingha et al. 2015; Hays 1996). Becoming a good mother remains deeply intertwined with ideals in which women are expected to devote intense efforts, time and resources to ensure their child's development (Abighannam and Atkinson 2016; Budds et al. 2017; Wall 2010).

Although mothers remain responsible for the majority of domestic and caring responsibilities (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013), their (re-)entry into the workplace can prompt

reflexivity regarding gender norms (McNay 1999a) and negotiations of increased involvement from husbands (Lyonette and Crompton 2014). Yet much of the existing research on motherhood, gender identity and consumption (c.f. Afflerback et al. 2013; Harman and Cappellini 2015; Voice Group 2010a; 2010b) focuses predominantly on white middle-class women. Other studies (c.f. Geiger and Prothero 2007; Moisio et al. 2004; Thomsen and Sorensen 2006) offer scant information on mothers' ethnicity<sup>2</sup>. Little is known about how ethnic minority women, particularly South Asian women, negotiate new gender identities as they become mothers. A primary motivation for this thesis is to address this gap by providing a nuanced insight into the lived experiences of a sample of South Asian women living in the UK as they incorporate motherhood into their gender identities.

Within consumer research, studies of ethnic minority consumers, including South Asian women, tend to use acculturation as a lens to examine how these consumers negotiate their identities between two cultures. Post-assimilationist consumer research has contributed important insights into how ethnic minority consumers negotiate multiple identities as they negotiate home and host cultures through their consumption practices (Lindridge 2010; Lindridge and Hogg 2006; Luedicke 2011; Sekhon and Szmigin 2011). However, studies of female ethnic minority consumers tend to portray women as negotiating between opposing sets of gender norms, in which ethnic minority gender norms are 'traditional' and host cultures are 'modern' (Chytkova 2011; Üstüner and Holt 2007). An acculturation lens may struggle to account for how South Asian women push the boundaries of gender norms within and across both (British) South Asian and British cultures. Focusing on acculturation may

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<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, the concept of ethnicity is recognised as a contested and socially constructed term, rather than a term that describes essential differences between groups (Brah 1996; Hall 1996). Ethnicity is regarded as in a state of negotiation and production with other forms of difference, as well as being socio-historically and culturally specific (Brah 1996). Section 3.3.3 elaborates further on how ethnicity is used in this thesis.

inadvertently portray South Asian women's negotiations as simply part of becoming assimilated to British culture (i.e. becoming westernised).

In contrast to consumer research, an acculturation approach is largely absent from sociological research on young South Asian women (Bagguley and Hussain 2016; Dwyer 2000; Ramji 2007; Shah et al. 2010). Seeking to question and break down popular stereotypes of young South Asian women as docile, oppressed and destined to become housewives and full-time mothers (Ahmad 2001; Dwyer 2000), such research focusses on how South Asian women are actively negotiating their identities in ways 'that cut across cultural spheres and involve complex struggles over different modes of being' (Ramji 2007:1174). In doing so, these studies have found that increasing numbers of South Asian women are transforming gender norms surrounding education, work and marriage as they negotiate access to university (Bagguley and Hussain 2016; Mohee 2011; Ramji 2008). This thesis shares the aims of such sociological research, and seeks to contribute a nuanced understanding of the complex ways in which these women negotiate new gender identities when they become mothers. Given that motherhood is a complex site in which powerful gender norms can be both reproduced and challenged, this thesis seeks to understand how South Asian women negotiate new gender identities at the intersection of multiple fields (Bourdieu 1984; 1986; McNay 1999a), such as the family field, education and work fields, as well as the British and (British) South Asian cultural and religious fields.

Foregrounding the negotiation of gender identity, a performative approach (Butler 1990) to gender identity is combined with the concepts of habitus, fields, reflexivity and capital (Bourdieu 1984; 1986). These concepts are used to examine these women's ability to negotiate new gender identities on becoming a mother, and the role of consumption in this process. By examining their trajectories to motherhood, the thesis also extends consumer

research on motherhood and consumption (Thomsen and Sorensen 2006; Voice Group 2010a; 2010b). Such research tends to portray (non-ethnic minority, middle-class) women as vulnerable to experiencing consumption-induced liminality during transitional phases. In this thesis, a performative-based approach is used to consider how South Asian women negotiate new gender identities by drawing on their prior experiences of negotiating their gender identities, which is often overlooked in existing literature (Molander 2016). Doing so enables the thesis to consider how South Asian women negotiate new gender identities and challenge gender norms, both during the transition to motherhood and through everyday consumption practices, including domestic responsibilities such as feeding the family, housework and childcare. By developing a nuanced understanding of similarities and differences within participants' experiences of motherhood, the thesis contributes to the study of motherhood and consumption, and ethnic minority mothers in particular.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

This section outlines the broader purpose of the research, in relation to motherhood and consumption (section 1.2.1) and in terms of understanding the experiences of South Asian mothers in particular (section 1.2.2).

### **1.2.1 Motherhood and consumption**

This section provides an overview of motherhood and consumption in the UK, outlining the context within which the research is based. Birth rates in the UK have risen rapidly over the last few decades, with more babies born in 2012 (813,000 births) than any other year since 1972 (Kasriel-Alexander 2014). The average age of mothers in the UK in 2015, when much of the data was collected, was 30.3 years (ONS 2016a), while the average age of a first-time

mother is 28.3 years (Babycentre 2015). Around 75% of first-time mothers are millennials<sup>3</sup> (Babycentre 2015). Mothers in the UK are now more likely to work than a decade ago (Kasriel-Alexander 2014), and their consumption practices are changing as they become more digitally savvy (Babycentre 2015).

In response to these increases in personal wealth, the baby market aimed at expectant mothers and new parents has become increasingly lucrative, providing an ever-expanding array of baby and maternity products that both acknowledge and intensify mothers' needs and demands (Kehily 2014). In the UK new mothers spend, on average, more than £1600 as they prepare for their first child, with one in twenty mothers spending more than £3000 (Stott 2014). In total, first-time parents in the UK spend around £492 million on items such as baby clothes, prams, cots, nappies, car seats, maternity products and baby toiletries (Aviva 2014). Mothers are also increasingly encouraged to purchase items that are deemed as 'baby essentials', which they often later question (Stott 2014). Despite recent challenging economic circumstances, spending within the new parents' segment remains robust, with the average spend on first babies increasing 17% between 2012 and 2014 (Aviva 2014).

As well as maternity and baby products, mothers are inundated with guidelines and advice on how to be a good mother (Voice Group 2010b). The market for expert advice for mothers has expanded from books and medical professionals to magazines, websites, apps, classes and parenting groups (Miller 2014). Recent research by Babycentre (2014; 2015) suggests that mothers are increasingly turning to parenting websites alongside the advice and support of family, friends and other parents. They are also spending more time on their mobiles, for example while watching television, to send texts, check social media and browse the internet

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<sup>3</sup> Millennials are people who were born between 1980 and 2000 (Wallop 2014).



(Babycentre 2015). Mothers are now more likely to use their smartphones while shopping to search for better prices elsewhere, text others to ask for their opinions or read product reviews (Babycentre 2015).

Despite having access to a wealth of information, products and services, and mobile communications that help them to seek advice, many mothers nevertheless feel enormous pressure to be a good mother (Babycentre 2015; Voice Group 2010). Indeed, 60% of new parents admit that they bought items that they did not need or use, with the most common items including ‘mum to be toiletries’, Moses baskets and baby slings (Aviva 2014). Although such consumption may offer mothers more choice, mothers feel increasingly under pressure to consume the appropriate products in order to be a good mother (Voice Group 2010a; 2010b).

Beyond the transition to motherhood, mothers’ everyday spending on their babies and children continues to rise. Latest estimates suggest that in a child’s first year, parents will spend £11,498, rising to £63,224 between one and four years old (Collinson 2016). In particular, childcare is a major cost for many women as they return to work. From 2015 to 2016 the cost of childcare rose by 4.3%, while general inflation stood at 0.2% and average wages rose by 2% (Collinson 2016). Around 66% of parents use formal childcare providers and 40% use informal childcare from family and friends, while 28% use childcare from both formal and informal providers (DFE 2016). After education and childcare, parents’ main expenditures on their children are on food, clothing, holidays, and hobbies/toys (Collinson 2016). In 2015 the value of the UK toy market alone stood at £3.2 billion, growing an average of 5.5% each year from 2014-2016 (Statista 2017). Couples with children are the largest consumer market in the UK, accounting for over a third of total consumer spending in the country (Euromonitor 2017).

Since mothers face an increasing array of consumption decisions, both during the transition to motherhood and beyond, understanding their experiences of how consumption shapes their gender identity negotiations remains an important area of study. This is particularly important given the longstanding history of migration to the UK, and the fact that births in England and Wales in 2015 to women born outside the UK are at their highest levels (27.5% of live births; ONS 2016b). It has arguably never been more pertinent to understand the role of consumption for ethnic minority mothers as they incorporate motherhood into their gender identities.

### **1.2.2 South Asian mothers living in the UK**

At around 14% of the UK population, ethnic minorities have a growing purchasing power of more than £300 billion (De Napoli 2013). According to the 2011 census (ONS 2012), there were approximately 3 million South Asians living in the UK, which equates to almost 5% of the UK population. ‘South Asian’ is a broad term that encompasses diverse groups (Rajiva 2013), and is used in this study to refer to participants who hail from the Indian sub-continent, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka<sup>4</sup>. The term ‘South Asian’ also includes people whose parent(s) were East-African Asians who migrated to the UK from countries such as Uganda. Since the term ‘Asian’ is sometimes used to refer to those who hail from China, Japan, and Korea, the term ‘South Asian’ is used in this study to avoid any confusion (Rajiva 2013).

South Asians are not a homogenous group, and there are diverse experiences and differences across different South Asian groups (Brah 1996; Rajiva 2013). In 2011, 2.3% of the UK

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<sup>4</sup> The ONS statistics on South Asians do not give information specifically on Sri Lankans – they fall under the ‘other Asians’ category, meaning that the more detailed statistics discussed only cover those of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage.

population described themselves as of Indian descent, 1.9% identified themselves as Pakistani, while 0.7% identified as Bangladeshi (ONS 2012). According to the 2011 census, there were around 2.7 million Muslims in the UK, which equated to 4.8% of the population (ONS 2012). Muslims are now the second largest religious group in England and Wales. At the 2011 census, around 1.5% of the population identified themselves as Hindu, while 0.8% identified as Sikh. The five major languages spoken by these groups include: Gujarati, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Bengali. Within and between these groups there are also differences in terms of gender, class, caste, regional differences and socio-cultural beliefs (Allendorf 2015; Brah 1996; Mehrotra and Casalanti 2010). As these differences intersect with family migration histories (Brah 1996), it is important to develop a nuanced understanding of South Asian women's lived experiences of becoming a mother.

The latest statistics show that only two thirds of babies born in 2015 were classified as white British (ONS 2016b). Around 8.5% of births were to women who identified their babies as of South Asian heritage (ONS 2016b). Approximately 4% of babies were identified as Pakistani, 3% were identified as Indian and 1.4% as Bangladeshi. Furthermore, the 2011 census showed that almost 10% of babies and children aged between 0-4 years old are Muslim, while 1.5% are Hindu and 0.8% are Sikh (Sedghi 2014). While these statistics do not provide details on whether the mothers themselves were UK born or non-UK born, they do point towards a growing need to understand the experiences of South Asian heritage mothers.

#### **1.2.2.1 UK-born South Asian mothers**

South Asian mothers who were born in the UK are likely to be the children or grand-children of South Asian immigrants, and they are typically referred to, and/or identify as, second- or third-generation. Their parents and/or grandparents may have come to the UK as part of one

of several periods of mass South Asian migration. The first of these periods began in the late 1940s, as part of a response to UK labour shortages following World War Two (Lindridge et al. 2004) and the partition of India and Pakistan. In the early 1960s immigration from the Indian sub-continent was at its peak, before tighter restrictions were put in place. The 1960s and 1970s saw a rise in the number of East African Asian immigrants, particularly in 1972, when the Ugandan leader Idi Amin expelled all Asians from the country (Brah 1996).

Second- and third-generation South Asian mothers are likely to have grown up in households where their parent(s) were employed in low-skilled jobs. For example, large numbers of Pakistanis migrated to work in textile factories in Leeds and Bradford, while many Bangladeshis migrated to the Tower Hamlets area of London to work in the clothing industry (Lindridge et al. 2004). Typically, these women lived within South Asian families and communities that sought to maintain aspects of their cultural, religious and community beliefs, with places of worship becoming central points of the community (Ghuman 1994).

However, they are also likely to have reached adulthood at a time when South Asian women's participation in higher education was increasing rapidly. Between 1994-95 and 2004-05 the number of Indian women starting full-time degrees increased by 85%, and for Pakistani women and Bangladeshi women 158% and 274% respectively, against an increase for white women of 43% (Bagguley and Hussain 2007). Having entered higher education, South Asian women are more likely to be able to negotiate and delay their marriage (Bagguley and Hussain 2016; Mohee 2011), yet little is known about how these negotiations shape these women's experiences of becoming a mother.

### **1.2.2.2 Non-UK born South Asian mothers**

The number of Indian born, Pakistani born and Bangladeshi born people living in the UK has risen steadily until 2015 (ONS 2016b). Statistics that offer a breakdown of immigration patterns based on gender, ethnicity and reason for migration are not published, so it is difficult to ascertain more detailed statistics on first-generation South Asian mothers. However, over a quarter of live births in England and Wales in 2015 were born to mothers who were born outside the UK, which is the highest level on record (ONS 2016b). After Poland, the most common countries of birth for mothers who gave birth in 2015 were Pakistan and India (2.5% and 2% of all live births respectively, ONS 2016b). Between 2001 and 2006, the most common countries of birth for non-UK born mothers were consistently Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

Many first-generation women come to the UK through marriage, with spouses being the largest single category of migrant settlement in the UK (Charsley et al. 2012). South Asians account for the largest proportion of migrant spouses in the UK, with a third of all grants of settlement given to South Asian spouses in 2008 (Charsley et al. 2012). South Asian women who migrate to the UK as adults are more likely to be disadvantaged in terms of the labour market than those born in the UK, as they are less likely to be able to speak English and have educational qualifications, or their qualifications may not be recognised in the UK (Dale 2008). However, women's education levels in South Asian countries both are increasing and shaped by different socio-cultural conditions such as migration from rural and urban contexts, social class, family structure and religion (Chudgar and Shafiq 2010; Dutta 2016).

Furthermore, migration patterns are complex and changing. As increasing numbers of South Asians migrate to the UK to study and work in highly-skilled sectors (Charsley et al. 2012), there may be more educated South Asian women migrating with, or joining their husbands.

Indeed, the first-generation participants in this study fall into this category of well-educated South Asian women who migrated to the UK with their husbands, to study and work at post-graduate level. The heterogeneous nature of first- and subsequent generations of South Asian women's sociocultural position and migration history is likely to shape their experiences of becoming a mother. Developing a nuanced understanding of how these women negotiate their identities as they become mothers has an important role to play in helping to unpick and question the wider popular stereotypes of South Asian women. In the UK context, South Asian women, especially Muslim women, often face significant scrutiny in terms of their integration and are typically portrayed as docile and destined to become housewives and full-time mothers (Ahmad 2001; Bell and Rajan 2017; Ramji 2007). Against this backdrop, it is increasingly important to consider the lived experiences of South Asian mothers as they negotiate their identities through mothering and consumption practices.

### **1.3 Thesis aims and research questions**

The thesis aims to understand the role that consumption plays for South Asian women as they negotiate new gender identities on becoming a mother. The aim is to understand how these women incorporate motherhood into their gender identities, and what shapes their ability to do so. These aims are summarised into three research questions:

- What role does consumption play as South Asian women incorporate motherhood into their gender identities?
- As South Asian women become mothers, how do these women negotiate new gender identities, and what shapes their ability to do so?
- How do these women's negotiations of new gender identities shape their mothering and consumption practices?

To address these questions, a qualitative, exploratory study draws on empirical research with 23 South Asian mothers living in the UK, recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. As an interpretive study, the research methodology assumes an existential-phenomenological stance, which is well-suited to both the research aims and the researcher's worldview. In-depth phenomenological interviews are used to gain a rich insight into participants' lived experiences of becoming a mother and their everyday mothering and consumption practices. Section 1.4 provides an overview of the thesis.

## **1.4 Thesis outline**

The thesis consists of seven chapters, including this introductory chapter, which outlines the rationale and purpose of the study, research aims and structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review, situating the thesis in relation to consumer research on negotiating gender identity. The chapter reviews existing literature on motherhood, which is discussed as a key site for negotiating gender identities through consumption. The chapter examines how the thesis relates to consumer research on negotiating gender identities between two cultures, and research on South Asian consumers in particular. Sections 2.4.2 and 2.4.3 provide insight into the South Asian gender norms and context in which participants negotiate their gender identities. The chapter concludes by outlining the theoretical approach that is used to understand how negotiating gender identities can both reproduce and challenge gender norms. Section 2.5 discusses how the concepts of habitus, field, reflexivity and capital can be incorporated into a performative approach to enable this thesis to extend consumer research in several ways.

Chapter 3 provides the research methodology, which is underpinned by a social constructionist and interpretivist stance. The chapter outlines how an existential

phenomenological approach fits with the researcher's worldview and the study's exploratory aim of understanding South Asian women's lived experiences of becoming a mother. The chapter discusses how the research design, methods (i.e. the use of in-depth interviews) and sampling strategies generated a rich dataset. The chapter offers an account of the research journey, and provides an overview of the research sample and methodological reflections on the research.

The findings of this thesis are organised into two chapters (4 and 5). Chapter 4 provides an outline of participants' accounts of their journey to motherhood. Throughout the interviews, participants frequently reflected on their upbringing and journey to motherhood to make sense of their mothering experiences. Chapter 4 captures the key themes that were prominent in participants' reflections, such as their socialisation within South Asian family hierarchies, and their negotiations surrounding higher education, marriage and starting a family. In doing so, the chapter discusses how participants negotiated new gender identities as independent women.

Chapter 5 focusses on participants' experiences of becoming a mother, and discusses the ways in which participants were incorporating motherhood into their gender identities. The first theme (section 5.2) considers the role of consumption during participants' transition to motherhood. The second theme (section 5.3) suggests that participants were 'finding a balance' as they negotiated their identities as both good mothers and independent women, by negotiating a more egalitarian approach to household and caring responsibilities. The final theme (section 5.4) discusses how participants regarded motherhood as an opportunity to reflexively socialise their children with the 'best of both worlds'. Throughout these themes, the chapter outlines the role of mothering and consumption practices in shaping



participants' experiences and reflections of negotiating new gender identities and challenging gender norms.

Chapter 6 provides the discussion, which relates the themes presented in Chapters 4 and 5 to the literature discussed in Chapter 2. The chapter presents a diagram (Figure 6.1) which helps to capture how participants negotiated new gender identities as good mothers and independent women. The chapter suggests that participants' ability to negotiate their gender identities was shaped by their trajectories to motherhood, and their reflexive habitus, which developed at the intersection of several overlapping fields. Throughout the chapter, mothering and consumption practices are presented as key ways in which participants challenge and reproduce gender norms as they negotiate their gender identities.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by reviewing how the thesis has addressed the research aims and questions. The chapter offers an overview of the theoretical contributions of the thesis, by outlining how the research contributes to the areas of consumer research that formed the basis of the literature review. The chapter brings the thesis to a close by discussing the marketing and policy implications of the research, as well as the limitations and areas for future research.

## **Chapter 2      Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter positions the thesis in relation to existing consumer research on negotiating gender identities. Section 2.2 examines the two main approaches that dominate such research: a social performance approach and a performative approach. The section evaluates these two approaches and discusses their relevance for this thesis. Section 2.3 considers existing research on motherhood, which is presented as a key consumption site for negotiating new gender identities. The section situates the thesis in relation to consumer research on the transition to motherhood, everyday mothering practices and the norms of intensive motherhood.

Section 2.4 examines consumer research on negotiating gender identities between two cultures. The section discusses how the thesis extends literature on how South Asian women negotiate their gender identities. The section also offers insight into the South Asian gender norms that women in this study are negotiating. Section 2.5 builds on section 2.2, which identified some ways in which a performative approach can be extended. Section 2.5 outlines how the concepts of habitus, field, reflexivity and capital are used in this thesis to develop an understanding of how South Asian women negotiate new gender identities as they become mothers. The section discusses how this theoretical approach might explain the extent to which South Asian women can both reproduce and challenge gender norms as they incorporate motherhood into their gender identities.

### **2.2 Gender identity and consumer research**

This section (2.2) situates the thesis within existing consumer research on gender identity. Section 2.2.1 offers a brief outline of the social construction of gender in relation to consumer research. Section 2.2.2 examines two key approaches to negotiating new gender

identities: gender identity as social performance, and gender identity as performative. Section 2.2.3 outlines how the thesis fits in relation to existing consumer research that focuses on negotiating new gender identities and changing gender norms.

### **2.2.1 The social construction of gender in consumer research**

The study of gender in consumer research has changed dramatically over the last two decades. Early consumer studies of gender (c.f. Aiken 1963; Gentry et al. 1978; Stern et al. 1987) were linked to the ‘disciplinary roots’ of consumer behaviour in behaviourist and cognitive psychology (Bettany et al. 2010:7). Here, gender was treated as a ‘variable’ to study ‘sex differences’, meaning that gender was seen as synonymous with ‘biological’, essential differences between men and women (Bettany et al. 2010; Haynes 2008; Hein and O’Donohoe 2014; Penaloza 1994). In sociology, however, significant developments in gender studies led to a differentiation between the categories of sex and gender, where sex refers to biological differences between men and women, while gender connotes the elements of difference that are socially constructed (Oakley 1972; West and Zimmerman 1987). By viewing gender as socially constructed, much gender research in sociology (Acker 1990; Connell 1987; Kesler and McKenna 1978; Risman 1982), including feminist research (Collins 1989; Henwood et al. 1998; Oakley and Roberts 1981; Risman 2004; Wetherell and Edley 1998), has questioned whether differences between men and women are solely reducible to innate biological differences.

Within consumer research, the early nineteen nineties is generally seen as a turning point for gender research, linked to the establishment of the biennial Association for Consumer Research Gender Conferences (see Bettany et al. 2010 for a more detailed history; Hein and O’Donohoe 2014). Reflecting earlier shifts in sociology and feminist scholarship, consumer research began to widen its view of gender from a ‘variable’ of biological difference by

drawing on the notion of gender as socially constructed (Bettany et al. 2010; Fischer 2015). Significant advances in our understanding of gender as socially constructed have helped consumer researchers to conceptualise gender as reproduced through norms, stereotypes and socialisation (Bettany et al. 2010). The social construction of gender has also begun to allow scholars to understand gender inequality and its role in marketing and consumption, offering a means of questioning the portrayal of men and women as distinct, opposed and unchanging categories (Gerson 2002; Penaloza 1994).

Charting a history of gender studies in marketing and consumer research, Bettany et al. (2010) distinguished between ‘sex difference’ research and ‘gender research’. In sex difference research, gender is treated as an ‘essential’ variable that is reducible to biological differences. Gender research, on the other hand, challenges the notion of sex difference as essential and has made significant contributions to understanding gender as socially constructed.

This thesis draws on the notion of gender as socially constructed. Bettany et al.’s (2010) distinction is helpful in locating the position of this thesis, which is situated firmly in the ‘gender research’ area of consumer research. Such a distinction is important because sex difference research persists within marketing and consumer research (c.f. Dahl et al. 2009; Durante et al. 2011; Wang et al. 2014), despite critique by many prominent gender consumer researchers (Bettany et al. 2010; Fischer 2015; Hein and O’Donohoe 2014; Hearn and Hein 2015; Maclaran 2015). However, gender research is also now a well-established area of marketing and consumer research (Murto 2015). This thesis takes as its starting point the negotiation of new gender identities, a topic which remains a contemporary theme of gender research (Bettany et al. 2010).

The concept of negotiation is used in this thesis in relation to identity, and refers to the ways in which identity ‘is constructed in consumption discourse and practice (Firat and Venkatesh 1995) as people express their tastes (Bourdieu 1984) and position themselves in relation to social categories’ (Barnhart and Penaloza 2013:1134). In line with existing consumer research on consumer identity negotiation (c.f Arnould and Thompson 2005; Askegaard et al. 2005; Barhart and Penaloza 2013; Holt and Thompson 2004), this thesis uses the term negotiation to understand how identity is ‘not something that is constructed and then finished but is instead a continuous process of negotiation’ (Cherrier and Murray 2007:2; see section 2.2.3 for further discussion of consumer identity research). The notion of negotiating identity is often used in consumer research to understand how consumers negotiate their identities in ways that (re-)produce and challenge intersecting social categories such as gender and class (Holt and Thompson 2004), or ethnicity (Askegaard et al. 2005; Lindridge 2010). Section 2.2.2 situates the thesis in relation to existing research on the negotiation of new gender identities.

### **2.2.2 Negotiating new gender identities and changing gender norms**

This section outlines the two main approaches used to understand how consumers negotiate new gender identities: a social performance approach and a performative approach. In particular, the section considers how these approaches can help to theorise how consumers negotiate new gender identities and change gender norms. Section 2.2.2.1 outlines the notion of ‘doing gender’ as a social performance (West and Zimmerman 1987:126). The social performance approach is relevant for this thesis because it allows us to consider how gender is performed through everyday practices and interactions, and within cultural contexts (West and Fenstermaker 1995). Section 2.2.2.2 suggests that Butler’s (1990) performative approach can be used effectively in this thesis to understand how consumers negotiate new gender identities, and how gender norms can be both re-produced and challenged.

### **2.2.2.1 ‘Doing gender’ as a social performance**

The concept of gender identity as a social performance is recognised as one of the most important ideas to emerge from contemporary sociology, and is widely used to theorise gender across many fields of study, including consumer research (Bettany et al. 2010; Wickes and Emmison 2007). Indeed, this dramaturgical approach can help us to understand how gender is performed through everyday consumption practices, such as mothering practices, and how gender identities are intertwined with cultural contexts, such as South Asian women living in the UK.

The concept of ‘doing gender’ was first developed by West and Zimmerman (1987:126). Their study has inspired a wealth of research based on their dramaturgical approach, in which gender is viewed as a ‘social performance’ (Beasley 2012; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Connell and Pearse 2015). West and Zimmerman draw on Garfinkel’s (1967) ethnomethodological study of a transsexual referred to as ‘Agnes’. They suggested that Agnes’ case helps us to understand how gender identity can be seen as ‘accomplished’, rather than something one ‘is’ (West and Zimmerman 1987:131). They argue that Agnes had to learn how to negotiate her gender identity, so that she could ‘pass’ as a woman (ibid.). To do so, West and Zimmerman modified Goffman’s (1976) concept of gender as a social performance.

Goffman (1976, 1977) argued that individuals function in society by performing certain roles, such as mother, father, son and daughter. He saw these roles as performed in a theatrical sense, with individuals performing their gender in certain ways to meet societal expectations. West and Zimmerman (1987) recognised the importance of Goffman’s view of gender as a social performance. Goffman’s work (1976; 1977) was different to other sociological studies of gender at the time, which largely fell under the banner of ‘sex-role

theory'. Sex-role theory and research focussed on explaining the different roles that men and women play in society as linked to innate biological differences between men and women. In contrast, Goffman (1977) saw gender as part of how individuals present themselves in society. For Goffman (1977:304), individuals perform gender identity to demonstrate how they meet 'ideals of masculinity (or femininity)'.

However, West and Zimmerman critiqued Goffman's (1977) depiction of gender as a dramatization that one chooses to perform in order to meet societal ideals. They did so by arguing that individuals do not choose to perform gender, but are continually 'doing' gender, as 'an ongoing activity embedded in everyday interaction' (West and Zimmerman 1987:130).

The social performance approach to gender identity is relevant to this thesis, as it helps to understand how performing gender is a 'situated doing', performed through practices (West and Zimmerman 1987:126). The notion that individuals perform their gender identities through practices, including consumption practices, helps to understand the role of consumption in negotiating gender identities. This thesis draws on the notion of gender identity as performed through mothering and consumption practices, such as purchasing baby products, parenting practices and domestic responsibilities. Consumption practices are important sites through which consumers negotiate their gender identities.

A social performance approach to gender identity also suggests that individuals perform gender identities in ways that are culturally specific (West and Zimmerman 1987). Such an approach highlights the importance of understanding the nuanced ways in which ethnic minority women negotiate their gender identities. This thesis examines how South Asian women living in the UK negotiate their gender identities through their consumption practices, embedded within their cultural context.

However, a social performance approach is somewhat limited in explaining how negotiating gender identities both produce and change gender norms. A social performance approach portrays individuals as having a ‘core’ gender identity, behind the performed roles that they enact (Thompson and Üstüner 2015:238). However, critics (Beasley 2012; Borgerson 2005; Butler 1990; McNay 1999a; Thompson and Üstüner 2015) have questioned the idea that individuals have a core, unified and stable gender identity. They argue that such a view offers little scope to consider the multiple, overlapping and competing sets of norms in which individuals are embedded (Beasley 2012; Pringle 2005; Thompson and Üstüner 2015).

Yet consumer research on both gender (c.f. Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Thompson and Üstüner 2015) and ethnicity (c.f. Lindridge and Hogg 2006; Sekhon and Szmigin 2011) suggests that consumers negotiate multiple, overlapping identities (see sections 2.3; 2.4). A social performance approach, based on the view of a stable, core gender identity seems rather limited to theorise consumers’ negotiation of new identities. Since the thesis aims to understand how South Asian women negotiate new gender identities (e.g. as both women and mothers), it is necessary to go beyond a social performance approach.

A social performance approach also tends to portray individuals’ performances in a dichotomous manner, usually either conforming/resisting, or being oppressed/subverting the dominant gender norms (Beasley 2012; Pringle 2005). Such an approach struggles to explain how individuals can negotiate new gender identities that both reproduce and challenge gender norms (Borgerson 2005). For this study, a dichotomous approach would limit our understanding of South Asian women’s experiences to either resisting or conforming, to either Western or South Asian gender norms.

To address these criticisms and to develop a nuanced understanding of how South Asian women negotiate new gender identities through their consumption practices, this thesis turns



to a performative approach to theorising gender identities. The notion of gender performativity (Butler 1990) is used in this thesis to overcome the limitations of a social performance approach, as section 2.2.2.2 discusses.

#### **2.2.2.2 Gender identity as performative**

Butler's work (1990; 1993; 1997) on gender performativity has had a profound effect on how feminists, sociologists, and consumer researchers theorise gender (Bettany et al. 2010). The possibility to 'undo' gender norms is seen as one of Butler's (2004) most important contributions to gender theory. In her earlier work, Butler (1990) argues that gender can potentially be 'worn or not worn', much like 'selecting an outfit to wear' (Bettany et al. 2010:14). She purports that new gender identities can be formed in a playful manner, being taken up and abandoned, unpacked and recombined (Butler 1990). As some critics note, (Morison and McLeod 2013; Üstüner and Thompson 2015), her emphasis on the potential for 'troubling' gender has resulted in some gender scholars (including some consumer researchers, c.f. Goulding and Saren 2009; Schouten and McAlexander 1995) conflating performativity with a social performance approach. However, in subsequent works (Butler 1993; 1997; 2004), she differentiates performativity from the social performance of gender (Morison and McLeod 2013). In this thesis, Butler's theory of performativity (1993; 1997; 2004) is used to understand how negotiating new gender identities can both reproduce and challenge gender norms.

There are some commonalities between the performative and social performance approaches to gender identity. Like West and Zimmerman (1987), Butler (1990:25) argues that gender identity is performed in everyday practices and is 'always a doing'. She views all gender identity as performed or enacted (Butler 2004), and shares the view that gender identities are 'culturally contingent' (West and Zimmerman 1987), constructed differently across different

socio-historical, cultural and political contexts (Thompson and Üstüner 2015:238). However, unlike a social performance approach, she posits that individuals do not possess 'a stable [gender] identity' (Butler 1988:519). Instead, her approach has enabled consumer researchers to examine consumers' multiple, overlapping identities (c.f. Hein and O'Donohoe 2014; Martin et al. 2006; see section 2.2.3). This study is also aligned to such a performative approach.

For Butler (1988:520), gender identity is 'the stylised repetition of acts through time'. Although she recognises that gender identities are performed, the concept of performativity is not captured fully by the term 'performance', which implies 'free play' or 'theatrical self-presentation' (Butler 1993:95). A performative approach suggests that individuals are not simply 'acting out' different ways of being in the world (Borgerson 2005:68). Rather than viewing gender identity as 'a voluntarist process of performance', gender identity is a compulsory 'reiteration of norms' (McNay 1999b:176). Iteration is a key aspect of performativity: gender identities and norms are not static, but are continually reproduced (Schroeder and Borgerson 2004).

The performance of gender identities produces a 'reiteration of previous doings' that become 'intelligible' as gender norms (Thomson et al. 2011:55). This constant reiteration of gender identities and norms can produce gender identities that appear 'natural', while foreclosing others (Borgerson 2005:68). The persistence of dominant gender norms can mean that opportunities for negotiating new gender identities seem more 'intelligible' or 'unthinkable' than others (Borgerson 2005:65). A performative approach is used in this thesis to understand how South Asian women encounter gender norms that not only shaped their upbringing, but also shape their ongoing negotiation of their gender identities as mothers.

Since gender identity is iteratively performed, performativity also offers a means to theorise how individuals can negotiate new gender identities, which both challenge and reproduce gender norms. Since gender identities and norms must be continually reproduced, there is a 'potential production of difference' (Borgerson 2005:68). Individuals are compelled to reiterate gender, but performances are 'imperfect' and their meanings are unstable and open to interpretation (Morison and MacLeod 2013:569). While gender norms may appear fixed, their meanings change over time and context, and can be interpreted in different ways (Morison and McLeod 2013). New gender identities can be negotiated to the extent that gender norms are 'entrenched but not unsurpassable boundaries' (McNay 2013:32).

The process of negotiating new gender identities involves 'questioning taken-for-granted assumptions', which can offer opportunities for new practices to emerge (Nentwich et al. 2015). These identities are produced through 'making changes in the repetitive performances' of gender identity, which are both 'radical and small' (Nentwich et al. 2015:240). From a performative approach, these everyday negotiations of gender identity can slowly change gender norms (Connell and Pearse 2015; Morison and McLeod 2013; Nentwich et al. 2015:240).

Using a performative approach in this thesis enables us to move beyond the dichotomous views associated with social performance approaches, such as oppression and conformity vs. resistance and subversion (Beasley 2012; McNay 2013). Such an approach offers a means of examining how negotiating new gender identities can be a source for social change, while accounting for the persistence and embeddedness of gender norms (Thomson et al. 2011:51). Here, a performative approach is used to understand how ethnic minority women negotiate new gender identities in subtle ways that both draw on and challenge gender norms. In particular, South Asian women's everyday mothering and consumption practices are seen as

key sites for negotiating new gender identities as well as reproducing and challenging gender norms.

Yet there are some aspects of negotiating new gender identities that performativity does not adequately address. Critics have noted that Butler's (1993; 1997) later accounts of performativity depict an increasingly negative account of resistance to dominant gender norms (Magnus 2006; McNay 1999b; Thompson and Üstüner 2015). Magnus (2006) and McNay (1999a) suggest that the concept of performativity lacks an adequate explanation of the extent to which in some contexts individuals can develop the ability to create new meanings and perform gender differently. This critique is significant, since performativity (alone) may not explain how South Asian women develop the ability to question gender norms and ways of negotiating new gender identities. A performative approach also limits our understanding of whether and how some South Asian women may be better positioned than others to negotiate new gender identities and challenge gender norms. This thesis therefore aligns itself with those gender scholars who draw on, yet extend, a performative approach, by incorporating sociological concepts including habitus<sup>5</sup>, field<sup>6</sup>, capital<sup>7</sup> and reflexivity<sup>8</sup> (McNay 1999a; McLeod 2005; Thompson and Üstüner 2015). These concepts

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<sup>5</sup> In this thesis, the concept of habitus is used to refer to a set of assumptions, habits, taken for granted ideas and ways of being, with which individuals engage, understand and move through the world (Bourdieu 1997). Section 2.5.1 elaborates further on this concept and how it informs the theoretical approach taken in this study.

<sup>6</sup> The concept of field denotes the social space in which habitus operates (McNay 1999a). Society is comprised of various overlapping fields (Adkins 2003), and individuals compete for resources to improve their position within the field (Holt 1997). See section 2.5.2 for further discussion of how this concept informs the thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu's concept of capital is used to understand the different resources that are available within/across fields, and the ways in which they can be used/converted to enhance one's position within a field (Erel 2010; Franceschelli and O'Brien 2014). See section 2.5.4 for further discussion of the different forms of capital and how they are relevant for this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> The concept of reflexivity is used in this thesis in relation to identity and refers to 'the act of an individual subject directing awareness towards itself, reflecting on its own practices, preferences and even the process of

(discussed in section 2.5) offer a means of understanding how individuals may reflexively negotiate new gender identities and challenge gender norms to different extents.

Section 2.2.3 positions the thesis in relation to existing consumer research that examines how consumers negotiate new gender identities and change gender norms.

### **2.2.3 Consumer research on negotiating new gender identities and changing gender norms**

This section begins by outlining how consumer research on negotiating gender identities has developed as part of a focus on consumer identity projects (Hearn and Hein 2015; Maclaran 2015). The section then highlights how much of this research assumes a social performance approach (Thompson and Üstüner 2015:237). In contrast, this thesis responds to recent calls to examine how consumers' negotiations of gender identity might disrupt 'taken-for-granted gender norms' (Fischer 2015; Maclaran 2015:1735). The section ends by discussing two highly relevant studies (Coskuner-Bali and Thompson 2013; Thompson and Üstüner 2015) that both draw on and extend a performative approach to negotiating gender identities. These studies are used to help position the thesis, as well as highlighting areas to which this thesis can contribute.

Understanding how consumers negotiate their gender identities has emerged in consumer identity research (Hearn and Hein 2015; Maclaran 2015; Murto 2015). Such research is based on the idea that consumers construct their identities through their consumption of products and services (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Belk 1988; McCracken 1986). What we possess and consume are incorporated into how we know or define ourselves and others,

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reflection itself" (Adams and Raisborough 2008:1168). Section 2.5.3 offers further discussion of how reflexivity informs the theoretical framework.

to the extent that 'we are what we have' (Belk 1988:160). Our 'possessions' incorporate 'all that we consider ours, such as personal belongings, persons, places, group possessions that help define our identity, and even parts of our bodies' (Noble and Walker 1997:30). This is not to say that we are simply the sum of all we consume, rather that consumption can help to create meaningful identities (Shankar and Fitchett 2002).

It is widely accepted, within consumer research, that individuals negotiate and construct their gender identity through consuming objects and experiences (Cronin et al. 2014; Fischer and Arnold 1990). The focus of gender research on consumer identity has largely been on understanding how consumers construct their gender identities through the 'symbolic' offerings of the marketplace (Arnould and Thompson 2005:868). The contexts for many of these studies (c.f. Goulding and Saren 2009; Kates 2002; Martin et al. 2006; Schouten and McAlexander 1995) are usually 'autonomous enclaves' that are somewhat removed from consumers' everyday lives (Thompson and Üstüner 2015:237). For example, Belk and Costa (1998:218), in their study of 'modern mountain men' suggest that within this enclave their participants were able to 'enact' different forms of masculinity. Similar studies have suggested that consumer enclaves and subcultures enable consumers to perform their gender identities in ways that appear less constrained by mainstream gender norms (Goulding and Saren 2009; Kates 2002; Martin et al. 2006; Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

Although these studies (c.f. Goulding and Saren 2009; Kates 2003) often refer to a performative approach, they portray autonomous enclaves as an alternative stage for the expression of individuals' real or true gender identity (Thompson and Üstüner 2015). For example, Martin et al.'s (2006) study found that female Harley Davidson riders were seeking escape from the confinements of their traditional domestic gender roles. Goulding and Saren (2009:30) focus on the gothic subculture at the Whitby Goth Festival, likening their

participants' performances to a 'sense of theatre'. Here, their participants can express their 'real' identity by temporarily managing their performance through clothing and acting (Goulding and Saren 2009:30, 34). Yet their suggestion that consumers have a 'core' or 'real' identity would be contested from a performative approach to gender identity (Thompson and Üstüner 2015).

Indeed, gender research often portrays consumers as having 'choice to manoeuvre' among gender norms (Hearn and Hein 2015:1640). In this thesis, such an approach would be problematic, because of its simplistic view of negotiating gender identities and changing gender norms. A social performance approach would portray South Asian women as able to choose how they negotiate their gender identities. Such a perspective overlooks how these consumers are positioned in culturally specific, and potentially unequal ways. Furthermore, since this study aims to consider how gender identities and norms are negotiated through everyday mothering and consumption practices, studies of autonomous enclaves tend to be less insightful, as they are far removed from (South Asian) women's everyday lives.

Even studies that focus on contexts that are more closely embedded in daily life (c.f. Holt and Thompson 2004; Martin et al. 2006; Moisio et al. 2013) tend to be based on a social performance approach (Thompson and Üstüner 2015). These studies often portray consumers as conflict resolvers, coping with or managing tensions in their contexts (Murto 2015). For example, several studies have examined how men construct their gender identities through managing tensions between traditional breadwinner roles and more emergent norms of masculinity, such as men-of-action heroes (Holt and Thompson 2004) and domestic masculinity (Moisio et al. 2013). These studies often cite a 'doing gender' approach, frequently drawing on West and Zimmerman (1987), Goffman (1976) or Butler (1990), with little distinction between the dramaturgical and performative approaches to gender identity.

A ‘recurrent assumption’ within these studies is that consumers possess a ‘core’ or true identity (Thompson and Üstüner 2015:238), which, as discussed, would be problematic in this study.

Given these limitations of existing consumer research, it is unsurprising that there have been calls for consumer research to examine ‘unequal gender power relations’ (Hearn and Hein 2015:1640). In particular Maclaran (2015:1735) calls for more insight into how consumers’ negotiations of gender identity might ‘disrupt taken-for-granted gender norms’. There is a small but growing number of studies that answer these calls (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Kjeldgaard and Storgaard 2010; Thompson and Üstüner 2015; Valtonen 2013; Zayer et al. 2012). Two of these studies (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Thompson and Üstüner 2015) are particularly relevant to this thesis, as both draw on and extend a performative approach to negotiating gender identities and changing gender norms. These studies are influenced by sociological concepts such as habitus, field, capital, and reflexivity, as well as performativity.

In the first of these studies, Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013) focus on a group of white middle-class American men who have become at-home fathers, drawing on Bourdieu’s (1984; 1986) theories of habitus, fields and forms of capital. Within consumer research, Bourdieu’s theories have been widely used to examine the ‘socio-cultural structuring’ of consumption (Allen 2002; Arsel and Thompson 2011; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013:19; Kates 2002; Üstüner and Holt 2007, 2010).

Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013) suggest that consumers negotiate their gender identity from different positions within different social fields. In particular, the authors suggest that consumers’ gendered habitus, cultural capital and movement between different social fields can affect their ability to negotiate new gender identities and change gender norms (see



section 2.5). They argue that the white, middle-class men in their study could invest and convert forms of cultural capital, as they left their breadwinning role to become at-home fathers. However, because these fathers were socialised with high levels of cultural capital, they were skilled at negotiating new gender identities by mobilising and converting different forms of capital. Due to their previous higher status position, they were able to push for wider cultural legitimacy in their new gender identities as stay-at-home fathers.

Coskuner-Balli and Thompson's (2013) findings are relevant in several ways. First, they suggest that consumers' primary gender socialisation (i.e. their upbringing/habitus) shapes their ongoing negotiation of new gender identities. Understanding South Asian women's gender socialisation will offer important insights into their ability to negotiate new gender identities. Second, their findings suggest that everyday parenting practices are important sites for negotiating gender identities and changing gender norms for consumers who occupy a dominant position (as white, middle-class men). This thesis extends Coskuner-Balli and Thompson's (2013) research by examining the extent to which consumers who occupy a marginal/minority position can pursue new gender identities and change gender norms as they become mothers. It also extends Coskuner-Balli and Thompson's (2013) study by considering what happens when a marginalised group of consumers encounter firmly entrenched gender norms, and seek to challenge these norms through their pursuit of new gender identities.

In the second of these studies, Thompson and Üstüner (2015) focus on how the US roller derby field, as a consumption site, opened up new ways for female consumers to negotiate new gender identities and change gender norms. They suggest that by participating in roller derby, their participants became 'reflexively aware' of the constraining yet dominant gender norms that shape both their primary gender socialisation and everyday lives. Such reflexivity

is argued to enable the derby girls to pursue ‘strategic’ acts of ‘embodied resistance’ whilst retaining a sense of legitimacy. Thompson and Üstüner’s (2015:257) findings suggest that, within certain consumption fields, female consumers can push the boundaries of dominant gender norms in the form of a ‘quiet revolution’.

The study carried out by Thompson and Üstüner (2015) helps to position this thesis in several ways. First, the thesis draws on their approach to negotiating new gender identities, which is well equipped to examine how ‘radical and small’ changes to gender norms can emerge, as new gender identities are performed (Morison and McLeod 2013; Nentwich et al. 2015:240). Second, Thompson and Üstüner’s (2015) findings could be extended to examine how consumers are reflexively pushing the boundaries of gender norms in everyday settings, such as parenthood, rather than specific marketplaces like U.S. roller derby. Third, while Thompson and Üstüner (2015) focus on how female consumers negotiate gender norms, scant information is offered regarding their participants’ ethnicity. Their findings shed little light on whether all consumers who occupy a marginal position are equally able to reflexively negotiate gender identities and norms. This thesis seeks to address these issues by examining whether and how some South Asian women may be better positioned than others to do so, as they become mothers.

Indeed, the context of motherhood is often regarded as a key consumption site in which deeply entrenched gender norms persist (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Ritch and Brownlie 2016). Section 2.3 outlines how this thesis fits in relation to existing consumer research on motherhood and the negotiation of new gender identities.

## **2.3 Negotiating gender identity and motherhood in consumer research**

Within consumer research, the negotiation of motherhood and gender identity has attracted increasing attention (Banister et al. 2016; O'Donohoe et al. 2013). Section 2.3.1 considers research that examines the role of consumption during the transition to motherhood. Section 2.3.2 focusses on consumer research beyond the transition to motherhood, examining how mothers negotiate their gender identities through everyday consumption practices, such as juggling caring responsibilities, work and domestic responsibilities (Thompson 1996). Section 2.3.3 examines research on the norms of intensive motherhood, which may shape (South Asian) women's negotiations of their gender identities, both during and beyond the transition to motherhood.

### **2.3.1 The transition to motherhood and consumption**

Consumer research on the transition to motherhood emerged as part of the study of consumer identities and symbolic consumption (see section 2.2.3). Consumer researchers were keen to study how consumers construct their identity through consumption during transitional phases of life (Molander 2016; Thomsen and Sorensen 2006). From such a perspective, consumers are portrayed as moving from one role to another (Molander 2016; Noble and Walker 1997; Thomsen and Sorensen 2006). Examples of life-role transitions that have been drawn on to illuminate consumers' identity construction include: adolescence (Cody and Lawler 2011), divorce (Bates and Gentry 1994), the empty-nest stage of a family (Curasi et al. 2001; Hogg et al. 2004), or even life events such as plastic surgery (Schouten 1991). The transition to motherhood is widely recognised as a major life-role transition (c.f. Atkinson 2014; Hogg et al. 2004; Prothero 2002; Thomsen and Sorensen 2006; Voice Group 2010a, 2010b).

Consumer researchers have argued that periods of transition are important phases in which consumers negotiating new identities tend to experience significant upheaval and uncertainty in their consumption practices (Noble and Walker 1997; Schouten 1991; Solomon 1983). Such transitions are usually theorised in consumer research using the concept of ‘liminality’ (Schouten 1991), an anthropological concept that has helped us to understand the complexities of identity construction during periods of change. Section 2.3.1.1 briefly outlines the concept of liminality before discussing how such research relates to this thesis.

### **2.3.1.1 Liminality and the role of consumption – helping or hindering mothers?**

Liminality refers to the notion that during transitional phases our identities are suspended and undergo re-construction (Noble and Walker 1997; Schouten 1991). In liminal phases, consumption can strongly affect how consumers feel about themselves and others (Noble and Walker 1997). Consumers negotiate new gender identities by using (and discarding) their existing and new possessions, to come to terms with aspects of their identity that they have left behind, as well as shaping their identity in their new life role (Mehta and Belk 1991). Consumers in liminal phases, such as the transition to motherhood, are therefore thought to be more likely to engage in identity construction, with consumption likely to assume an increasingly symbolic role (Schouten 1991; Solomon 1983).

Consumer research has found that consumption during the transition to motherhood typically generates meanings that extend beyond necessity and function (Banister and Hogg 2006; Prothero 2002). Other studies have found that expectant mothers, as their pregnancy progresses, often consume a wide range of products and services, ranging from ovulation and pregnancy testing kits, maternity clothing, and birthing equipment to baby clothes, parenting manuals, nursery furniture, car seats, prams, feeding equipment, toys and nappy

changing paraphernalia (c.f. AbiGhannam and Atkinson 2016; Banister and Hogg 2006; Thomsen and Sorensen 2006).

Purchasing baby products during pregnancy enables women to start thinking about themselves as mothers (Banister and Hogg 2006; Theodorou and Spyrou 2013; Thomsen and Sorensen 2006; Voice Group 2010a). Women are faced with an array of consumption choices, such as deciding whether to buy products that are gendered by colour (e.g. pink for girls, blue for boys, yellows as neutral), whether to use a dummy/pacifier, immunisations and such like. However, few studies have considered whether consumption plays a symbolic role for expectant women who occupy marginal positions (Banister et al. 2016), particularly ethnic minority women. This thesis examines the role of consumption during the transition to motherhood for ethnic minority consumers.

Early studies mainly of white middle-class mothers suggest that during the transition to motherhood women consumed baby and maternity products to *help* them to construct new gender identities as mothers (c.f. Carrigan and Szmigin 2004; Jennings and O'Malley 2003; Thomsen and Sorensen 2006; Prothero 2002). Like much existing consumer research on role transition, liminality and identity (c.f. Noble and Walker 1997; Schouten 1991), early studies of motherhood (c.f. Jennings and O'Malley 2003; Prothero 2002) were based on the notion that consumption is a means of easing or reducing liminality, by offering an array of marketplace opportunities for new mothers.

However, later research has argued that consumption may not always ease women's experiences of becoming a mother (Carrigan and Szmigin 2004; Thomsen and Sorensen 2006; Tonner 2016; Voice Group 2010a, 2010b). While consumption may offer women opportunities to negotiate their gender identity as a mother, gaps between the expectations and realities of mothering can emerge (Banister et al. 2010; O'Malley 2006; Voice Group

2010a, 2010b). Although some women may embrace the offerings of the marketplace, others may feel overwhelmed (Carrigan and Szmigin 2004).

These studies suggest that consumption can play a complex, ‘problematic and ambivalent role’ in transitional phases (Voice Group 2010a:393). Women may not always know how to consume through this transitional phase, implying that consumption does not always ‘solve’ liminality (Thomsen and Sorensen 2006; Voice Group 2010a:376). Other studies have also found that consumption can play an ambivalent role in women’s negotiation of their identity as new mothers (Ogle et al. 2013; Thodorou and Spyrou 2013; Tonner 2016). Some have even suggested that consumption may often cause or heighten consumer liminality (Ogle et al. 2013; Thomsen and Sorensen 2006; Voice Group 2010a, 2010b). Such research suggests that liminality can cause new mothers to experience feelings of ambivalence and vulnerability (Voice Group 2010a; 2010b). For example, they may feel overwhelmed and unfamiliar with consumption choices regarding products such as nursery items, food, and clothing (Voice Group 2010a).

To overcome vulnerability and ambivalence, mothers tend to adopt different ‘coping strategies’ (Voice Group 2010a:393), including seeking advice, trial and error, and consuming excessively or expensively to minimise the chance of missing the right product (Voice Group 2010a). However, these studies typically focus on ‘mainly white, middle-class’ mothers (Theodorou and Spyrou 2013; Voice Group 2010a:379), or offer little information regarding participants’ ethnicity (Thomsen and Sorensen 2006). Such research offers little insight into whether ethnic minority women encounter feelings of ambivalence or vulnerability, nor whether they need to adopt such coping strategies as they consume to prepare for motherhood.

While the concept of liminality has contributed significant insight into the complex role that consumption plays in the transition to motherhood, such a focus may overlook some important ways in which ethnic minority women negotiate new gender identities as they become mothers. A common assumption, across much of the transition to motherhood literature, is the notion of motherhood as a 'role' (Molander 2016). Once women learn strategies to 'cope' with the transition to motherhood, it is assumed that they will manage the demands of motherhood, at least until the next transitional phase. Portraying consumers as transitioning in a linear fashion, from role to role, does not adequately account for the 'routinized' aspects of negotiating gender identity (Molander 2016:2). Focussing solely on the transition to motherhood might overlook how South Asian women negotiate new gender identities and change gender norms through everyday consumption practices.

A role transition approach also struggles to consider how women continually incorporate their 'prior experiences' of life into their practices of mothering (Molander 2016:2). Such a focus would struggle to account for the 'positional aspects' of gender identity construction, where mothering identities emerge from individuals' multiple and overlapping identity practices (Molander 2016:2; Thompson and Üstüner 2015; Üstüner and Thompson 2012). In particular, focusing on liminality and role transition overlooks the significance of South Asian women's primary gender socialisation and ongoing negotiations of their gender identities. The emphasis on women as 'coping' with or 'vulnerable' to liminality (Voice Group 2010a: 378, 393), offers little scope to consider the creative ways in which they might negotiate new gender identities and push the boundaries of gender norms. This approach also offers little consideration of whether and how some women may be better positioned than others to negotiate the powerful gender norms surrounding motherhood.

In contrast, this thesis assumes a performative approach to understanding how South Asian women negotiate new gender identities, both during the transition to motherhood and through everyday mothering practices. A performative perspective offers a means of overcoming the rather negative view of women as ‘coping’ or ‘vulnerable’ (Voice Group 2010a, 2010b). Instead women can be viewed as both reproducing and in some cases changing gender norms surrounding motherhood. Furthermore, Cappellini and Yen’s (2016: 1279) recent study has suggested that a less linear approach to motherhood and identity is especially important for understanding ethnic minority mothers’ experiences, since ‘being in-between and doing mothering across cultures, is a latent, albeit permanent condition, that manifests itself during mundane practices’. Phillips and Broderick (2014) called for more studies that examine women’s ongoing negotiations of their gender identities through everyday consumption practices. This thesis responds to these calls by offering insights into how South Asian women use consumption to negotiate their gender identities, both during and beyond the transition to motherhood.

Section 2.3.2 positions the thesis in relation to consumer research on everyday mothering and consumption practices. These consumption practices are presented as important sites for examining South Asian women’s ongoing negotiation of new gender identities.

### **2.3.2 Negotiating gender identities in everyday mothering and consumption practices**

A growing body of consumer research examines women’s negotiations of gender identity in relation to everyday practices of motherhood (c.f. Cappellini et al. 2014; Carrigan and Szmigin 2006; Harman and Cappellini 2015; Moisio et al. 2004; Molander 2016; O’Donohoe et al. 2013; Thompson 1996). These studies are particularly relevant here, as they capture how women continue to negotiate their gender identity as mothers, beyond the



initial transition to motherhood. While these studies rarely focus on ethnic minority mothers, they help us to understand how gender norms may be reproduced and challenged through negotiating mundane consumption practices, such as the domestic division of housework and caring responsibilities. The following sections outline three important and interlinked sites of mothers' everyday consumption practices that are emerging within such consumer research. Section 2.3.2.1 examines the domestic division of labour, section 2.3.2.2 discusses literature on food consumption, while section 2.3.2.3 focuses on childcare consumption.

### **2.3.2.1 Domestic division of labour**

Despite changes in women's gender roles, evidence suggests that women are still responsible for most household and childcare responsibilities (Carrigan and Szmigin 2006; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Mannino and Deutsch 2007). When women become mothers they typically learn how to juggle their caring responsibilities alongside their participation in the workforce, meaning that they often face the 'second shift' of domestic duties once their paid work is over (Hochschild 1989; Thompson 1996). Thompson (1996) examines how white, middle-class, working women make trade-offs and compromises to juggle their family duties. Similarly, Cappellini et al. (2014) focus on how middle-class women in Italy often feel responsible for managing the household, and sacrifice their own needs, especially in times of austerity.

These studies suggest that when women become mothers they often find themselves negotiating deeply entrenched, traditional gender norms. Domestic responsibilities such as shopping (Miller 1998) and cleaning (Carrigan and Szmigin 2006) are practices in which many white middle-class women feel the need to sacrifice themselves for the good of the family (Cappellini and Parsons 2014). Yet Cappellini et al. (2014) suggest that as their Italian participants were negotiating domestic labour, they were changing traditional gender norms,

albeit slowly. Molander's (2016:17) study of white, middle-class single mothers found that women in marginal positions can both reproduce and challenge gender norms, by 'destabilising our traditional ideas' of what it means to mother. These women drew on their status as single mothers to 'use it as a way towards a more egalitarian society' (Molander 2016:13).

Similarly, Cappellini and Parsons (2014) found that their participants had ongoing negotiations with family members to achieve a more equitable division of household tasks. Although such research has largely overlooked the experiences of ethnic minority women, these findings suggest that negotiating domestic responsibilities may be an important site in which South Asian women might both reproduce and challenge traditional gender norms. The thesis extends this literature by taking a performative approach to examining how South Asian women negotiate new gender identities through the division of domestic responsibilities.

### **2.3.2.2 Food consumption**

Following influential studies in sociology (De Vault 1991; Miller 1998; Oakley 1974), consumer research has recognised feeding the family as an important means through which women negotiate their gender identities as mothers (Harman and Cappellini 2015; Moisio et al. 2004). Feeding the family is intertwined with consumption practices, and includes all the tasks associated with planning, purchasing, storing, cooking and preparing food, as well as related tasks such as washing up and clearing away (Meah 2013). Research has shown how homemade food can evoke powerful emotions and can symbolise a mother's devotional love for her family (Moisio et al. 2004). White, middle-class mothers feel morally accountable for the food they provide for their families, for example in their children's lunchboxes

(Harman and Cappellini 2015). Italian middle-class mothers feel similarly responsible during times of economic hardship (Cappellini et al. 2014).

In a similar vein, Moisio et al. (2004:366) found that mothers' provision of food has 'moral undertones', with women feeling a sense of duty and care in bringing the family together to share home-made food. They argued that although the meanings and practices surrounding homemade food differ from one generation to the next, family food consumption is a means of 'transmitting cultural heritage across generations' (Moisio et al. 2004:365). Their study suggests that homemade food plays a moral role in preserving family identity and traditions, as a remedy to market-made products which can pose a 'threat' to family identity. They also indicate that mothers bear much of the responsibility for ensuring the transmission of their family's cultural heritage across the generations. However, Moisio et al. (2004) offer little information as to the ethnic background of their participants. As such, it is unclear whether their findings also apply to ethnic minority mothers.

More recent studies (O'Donohoe et al. 2014; Miller 2005) have also recognised that mothers are 'powerful transmitters of culture trans-generationally' (Hollway 2010:142). Such research is likely to be of particular significance to the South Asian women, who negotiate food consumption between home and host cultures. This thesis extends such research by examining the role of food consumption in ethnic minority women's gender identity negotiation. Food consumption could be a key way in which South Asian women transmit elements of their cultural and religious heritage to their children.

However, consumption practices involved in feeding the family are also an important site for the reproduction, subversion and disruption of gender norms (Cappellini et al. 2014; Meah 2014; Moisio et al. 2004). Carrigan and Szmigin (2006) consider the role of convenience products and the extent to which they can empower women as part of their

domestic and caring responsibilities. They found that the white, middle-class women in their study used convenience products to reject the ideals of good (or intensive) motherhood, in particular, the self-sacrificing and labour intensive ideals. These women felt empowered by their skills ‘as a mother and homemaker’, yet these products enabled them to maintain ‘independence and fulfilment’ outside the domestic sphere (Carrigan and Szmigin 2006: 1137).

While Carrigan and Szmigin’s (2006) study suggests that their participants were challenging the norms of ‘good’ motherhood, the mothers nevertheless remained largely responsible for managing these domestic and caring duties. There is little discussion of the persistence of traditional gender norms or any consideration of whether participants were seeking a more egalitarian distribution of domestic gender roles with their husbands. The authors also recognise that little is known about the extent to which ethnic minority women negotiate the norms of good motherhood through feeding the family. This thesis extends existing research by examining how ethnic minority, working mothers negotiate the demands of juggling their career with feeding the family. A performative approach is an effective means to understand how mothers’ changing consumption patterns of feeding the family can reproduce and change wider gender norms in complex ways.

### **2.3.2.3 Childcare consumption**

A small number of studies examine mothers’ childcare consumption practices (Epp and Velageletti 2014; Huff and Cotte 2013). Huff and Cotte (2013) suggest that mothers are typically responsible for arranging their children’s childcare. Their participants found that the process was complex and constrained by several factors, including the local market, mothers’ busy schedules and persistent gender norms which deem mothers as the best carers for their children. While struggling with the expectation to become full-time mothers,

finding the best childcare possible was key to enabling these women to embrace their return to work and demonstrating to themselves that they were doing their best for their children.

Epp and Velageletti (2014) found that outsourcing childcare can involve tensions, as parents feel that they ought to remain in control of their children's care. Their participants were questioning whether the market can provide an adequate substitute for a mother's full-time caregiving. However, they suggest that mothers typically manage these tensions by negotiating complex blends of care, from a variety of sources. Such blends often involved drawing on family members, friends and market-based childcare such as day-care nurseries, nannies and potty trainers. In negotiating these complex blends, Epp and Velageletti (2014) argue that mothers (and their families) are slowly challenging the norms that place market-based provision at odds with the mothers' role as the best carers for their children.

While Epp and Velageletti (2014) recruited participants from a range of different backgrounds, including by ethnicity and class, Huff and Cotte's study (2013:81) draws solely on the experiences of 'Caucasian' mothers. However, both studies suggest that outsourcing childcare is an important consumption site through which mothers can negotiate new gender identities and challenge gender norms, particularly as they return to work. This thesis could extend their findings by considering whether market-based childcare plays a similar role for ethnic minority women in the UK context.

This section has positioned the thesis in relation to existing consumer research on everyday mothering and consumption practices. Such research has established that managing domestic and caring responsibilities, feeding the family and childcare, are important sites of consumption where women can negotiate new gender identities and changing wider gender norms. Consumer research on both the transition to motherhood and everyday mothering practices have suggested that the ideals of good motherhood remain powerful in shaping

how women negotiate their gender identities. Section 2.3.3 examines literature on the prevailing norms of how to be a ‘good mother’, which are encapsulated by the concept of ‘intensive motherhood’ (Hays 1996).

### **2.3.3 Being a ‘good’ mother: The norms of intensive motherhood**

The term ‘intensive mothering’ is widely accepted as the dominant discourse of motherhood (Arendell 2000; Atkinson 2014; Shirani et al. 2012; Voice Group 2010a). Intensive motherhood refers to the notion that mothers should devote intense amounts of time, emotion, energy and resources to ensure their child’s development (Arendell 2000; Christopher 2012; Hays 1996; Shirani et al. 2012; Voice Group 2010a). The norms of intensive motherhood are highly pervasive (Hays 1996). Motherhood is widely depicted across many societies as a ‘natural’ part of being a woman, emphasising women’s instinctive bonding and an intuition for how to care for a child (Miller 2007). In intensive mothering, ‘good’ mothers are expected to be self-sacrificing, positioning the baby’s/child’s needs as paramount (Arendell 2000).

Research on motherhood and consumption has suggested that consumption is embedded deeply within the ideals of intensive motherhood (c.f. Cairns et al. 2013; Clarke 2004; Miller 2014; Taylor et al. 2004). These studies suggest that women are expected to consume appropriately for the safe arrival of their child, both by following expert advice, and by purchasing the (many) appropriate baby products in readiness for the baby’s arrival. However, most research on intensive motherhood and consumption focuses mainly on white, middle-class mothers. A small number of studies have considered how intensive motherhood shapes working-class or young, low-income mothers’ consumption (c.f. Banister et al. 2016; McCormack 2005; Ponsford 2011; Romagnoli and Wall 2012). This thesis extends existing

research by considering the extent to which intensive motherhood shapes ethnic minority women's consumption as they become mothers.

The need to consume the appropriate baby products during pregnancy is often referred to as 'nesting' (Miller 2007). 'Nesting', or 'being ready' for childbirth and early motherhood involves 'creating a space for the baby to inhabit' (Afflerback et al. 2014:2). White middle-class mothers regard nesting not only as practical, in terms of having everything the baby needs, but as a 'symbolic marker' of new motherhood (ibid.). However, little is known about whether ethnic minority mothers feel the need to nest, by purchasing everything they need during pregnancy.

As part of the need to prepare appropriately for motherhood, intensive motherhood also emphasises women's responsibility for their (unborn) child, with consumption again playing a key role. Even prior to conception, women who are trying to conceive are advised to modify their consumption choices, such as by taking folic acid supplements and avoiding 'risky' smoking or drinking (Lupton 2011; O'Malley and Patterson 2014). Expectant mothers and their unborn babies are monitored frequently at antenatal appointments, with advice on how to modify their consumption and lifestyle habits issued accordingly (Markens et al. 2010). Experts have produced extensive guidelines to which pregnant women are expected to (at least attempt to) adhere to reduce the risk of harm to unborn babies, such as avoiding uncooked meats, soft cheeses, liver and caffeine (Gatrell 2014).

To follow such guidelines, expectant mothers are encouraged to consume an array of expert advice (Gram et al. 2016). As part of the discourse of intensive mothering, the responsibility for precautionary consumption rests firmly with the mother, from the very moment of conception (MacKendrick 2014). Yet studies (Gatrell 2014; Miller 2005) have shown that the breadth of advice available may often overwhelm mothers, and may conflict with 'lay

advice' from family and friends. However, these studies are typically based largely on the experiences of white, middle-class mothers. This thesis extends such literature by considering whether South Asian women encounter similar, or even more complex pressures to consume expert advice appropriately.

Existing research on mainly white, middle-class mothers has highlighted the often contradictory norms of intensive motherhood. These mothers often feel vulnerable as they adapt to new marketplaces, and do not always know how to consume appropriately (Miller 2014; Voice Group 2012a and 2010b; see section 2.3.1). For example, Miller (2007) has questioned the need to rely on experts, if mothers should instinctively know how to prepare and care for a baby. Miller (2005) suggests that white, middle-class mothers gradually learn to question and reject some aspects of formal advice, and shift towards advice gained from other mothers' first-hand experiences. However, little is known about whether ethnic minority women are equally positioned to negotiate and question different forms of expert advice.

Other studies (Gatrell 2005; Miller 2014; 2007) have shown that regardless of the consumption of maternity and baby products, and expert advice, the actual experience of childbirth is often a complete shock to women. Despite being 'surrounded by all the paraphernalia' (e.g. Tens machines, breast pumps, maternity bras, nappy dispensers), many white, middle-class new mothers are often rendered 'baffled' by their early experiences of motherhood (Miller 2014:166). Even with all the right products, first outings with a new baby resemble 'military operation[s]' that are fraught with risk and uncertainty (ibid.). Yet we know very little about whether ethnic minority women feel that any preparatory consumption has helped or heightened any gaps between their expectations and experiences



of motherhood. This thesis extends such literature by examining South Asian women's reflections on their consumption practices during the transition to motherhood.

Studies involving mainly white middle-class mothers (c.f. Cairns et al. 2013; Hays 1996; Ritch and Brownlie 2016) have suggested that the norms of intensive mothering extend far beyond transition to motherhood. Mothers are construed as responsible for the development of our society's future citizens (Cairns et al. 2013; Wall 2010; 2013). Under intensive mothering, experts have expanded what constitutes the 'needs' of the child, from physical care to 'emotional, psychological and cognitive needs' (Romagnoli and Wall 2012:273).

This focus on children's development is intertwined with the expectation for mothers to spend prolonged one-to-one 'quality time' with children (Boyd 2002). Childrearing experts claim that this 'stimulate[s] brain development' (Wall 2010:254). Despite little evidence to support these claims, mothers are deemed responsible for cultivating their child's future intellectual capabilities (Wall 2010). Studies of predominantly white middle-class mothers (Budds et al. 2017; Wall 2010) found that they were monitoring their children's consumption activities, selecting toys, activities and experiences that stimulate their child's development. They felt the need to place their child's needs as paramount in their consumption choices; not doing so was perceived as risky for their child's health and development (Afflerback et al. 2013). Through intense planning and expert advice, mothers often seek to minimise the risk of being a 'bad parent' (Shirani et al. 2009). What is not clear from such research is whether ethnic minority mothers feel similarly responsible for ensuring their child's development.

For many mothers, everyday consumption decisions become 'key markers' of their ability to 'do what's best' for their baby (Atkinson 2014, Cairns et al.; Knaak 2010:349; Ritch and Brownlie 2016). Since intensive mothering requires an intense investment of resources, the

Voice Group (2010a:379) posit that their sample of ‘mainly white, middle-class’ women ‘should be amply equipped’ to negotiate the consumption norms surrounding intensive motherhood and ‘may be less prone to experiencing consumer ambivalence than other, perhaps more marginalised, consumer groups’. However, there is a gap in knowledge regarding whether ethnic minority women feel the need to demonstrate their child’s development, which this thesis addresses.

The norms of intensive motherhood also reinforce traditional gender norms, by portraying motherhood as a source of fulfilment for women (Epp and Velageletti 2014; Shirani et al. 2012). Existing research suggests that mothers often experience feelings of guilt and frustration if they are unable to meet the norms of intensive motherhood (c.f. Gatrell 2014; Lupton 2011; MacKendrick 2014; Malacrida and Boulton 2014; Markens et al. 2009; O’Malley and Patterson 2014). Despite the pervasive intensity of these norms, relatively little attention has been given to mothers who occupy marginal positions (Banister et al. 2016), especially ethnic minority consumers. This thesis redresses this shortcoming by offering insight into how South Asian women are both reproducing and challenging the norms of intensive mothering as they negotiate their gender identities.

Overall, this section has positioned the thesis in relation to existing consumer research on motherhood and has outlined the ways in which this thesis can extend such research. Section 2.4 focuses on how South Asian women negotiate their gender identities. The section also provides a discussion of the sociocultural context in which the women in this study are situated.

## **2.4 Consumer research on South Asian women's negotiation of gender identity**

This section relates to existing consumer research on how ethnic minority women negotiate their gender identities, with a focus on South Asian women. Section 2.4.1 examines consumer research on how ethnic minority consumers negotiate their gender identity. Section 2.4.2 discusses the South Asian gender norms that women in this study are negotiating, highlighting how these norms are both deeply entrenched yet slowly shifting. Section 2.4.3 situates this thesis in relation to research which has examined how South Asian women are negotiating new gender identities. Much of this research has focussed on higher education and marriage, whereas this thesis examines motherhood as the key context.

### **2.4.1 Negotiating gender identity between two cultures**

Most of the existing consumer research on ethnic minority consumers, including South Asian contexts (c.f. Jamal and Chapman 2000; Lindridge 2010; Lindridge and Hogg 2006; Lindridge et al. 2004; Sekhon and Szmigin 2011), focusses on consumer acculturation. Consumer acculturation is 'the general process of movement and adaptation to the consumer cultural environment in one country by persons from another country' (Penaloza 1994:33). It is a part of the acculturation process, and involves the process of learning and performing 'consumer behaviours, knowledge and skills specific to and existing within a specific culture' (Lindridge 2010:445).

Research on consumer acculturation has undergone considerable development over the last three decades, extending and critiquing models of acculturation (see Luedicke 2011 for a detailed review). Early consumer acculturation research was usually based on the assumption that migrants would gradually become assimilated with their new cultural context, and often sought to measure consumers' level of assimilation (Luedicke 2011).

Many studies at the time (c.f. Desphande et al. 1986; Reilly and Wallendorf 1984; 1987; Saegert et al. 1985) drew on Berry's acculturation model (1997), which purports that migrants can adopt four acculturation strategies depending on their attitudes to both their original and new cultural context: assimilation, integration, segregation or marginalisation.

However, several scholars of consumer acculturation questioned these assumptions. For example, O'Guinn et al. (1986) suggested that the acculturation process does not take a linear path towards assimilation, and can follow multiple paths simultaneously. Others argued that Berry's model (1980) does not account for more complex acculturation outcomes such as over-identification (Wallendorf and Reilly 1983) and hyper-assimilation (Mehta and Belk 1991).

Building on these critiques, a body of 'post-assimilationist' consumer acculturation research has developed a richer, more complex account of consumer acculturation experiences (c.f. Askegaard et al. 2005; Jafari and Goulding 2008; Jamal and Chapman 2000; Lindridge et al. 2004; Luedicke 2011; Oswald 1999; Penalosa 1994; Üstüner and Holt 2007). These studies establish that migrants' consumer identity projects are multiple and fluid between two cultures, rather than always moving towards assimilation with the new culture. For example, Oswald (1999:310) found that Haitian immigrants to the USA were able to 'swap cultures by swapping goods'. The notion of fluid ethnic identity was further explored by Askegaard et al. (2005), whose study of Greenlandic immigrants in Denmark found that consumers move between multiple hybrid identities, whilst Lindridge et al. (2004) purported that young South Asian consumers in the UK construct multiple identities through consumption, as they move between different cultural contexts.

An important premise of post-assimilationist consumer acculturation studies, then, is the notion that ethnic minority consumers construct new and multiple identities as they move

between two cultures. From this ‘multiple identity’ perspective, ethnic identities are not ‘core’, stable identities, but are constantly reproduced, often in conflicting, multiple ways (Bhatia 2002: 61). Ethnic minority consumers can be understood as constantly reiterating their identities (Lindridge and Hogg 2006; Lindridge et al. 2004; Chytкова 2011). The multiple identity approach portrays ethnic identity as a ‘reiterative performance’ (Brah 1996:234), much like Butler’s (1997) performative approach to gender identity. Some overlap is evident between these approaches to negotiating identity, with consumption playing an important role in constructing ethnic and gender identities. Indeed, there have been calls to examine how consumers’ identities are negotiated at the intersection of multiple social categories such as gender, ethnicity and class (Gopaldas and DeRoy 2015; Gopaldas and Fischer 2012; Hearn and Hein 2015).

Several post-assimilationist studies examine gender identity as part of acculturation, emphasising how ethnic minority consumers negotiate between two different cultures (Chytкова 2011; Lindridge et al. 2004; Lindridge and Hogg 2006; Üstüner and Holt 2007). These studies portray women as drawing on two cultures with conflicting gender norms, who negotiate their gender identity with different outcomes. For example, Üstüner and Holt (2007) argue that rural Turkish women who migrated to squats surrounding Turkish cities struggled to adapt their traditional gender socialisation to the norms of modern, middle-class womanhood. Chytкова (2011) examined how Romanian women working in unskilled, low-status jobs in Italy were nevertheless able to use food consumption to negotiate between the norms of traditional, Romanian femininity and norms of modern Italian womanhood. In both studies, the two minority cultures that women were negotiating (rural Turkey and Romanian) are portrayed as having traditional gender norms, while the dominant, new cultures (urban Turkey and Italy) are portrayed as having modern gender norms where women can be independent, well-educated and successful women.

However, literature on motherhood, within both sociology and consumer research, suggests that although women in Western cultures are more likely to become educated and enter the workforce, these shifts have intensified women's responsibilities, as they remain largely responsible for managing and undertaking domestic and caring duties (see section 2.3; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Hays 1999; Hochschild 1989; Mannino and Deutsch 2007; Thompson 1999). Motherhood therefore represents a significant site for examining the role of consumption in negotiating gender identity, precisely because the ideals of intensive motherhood persist as a key part of women's gender identity as mothers (see section 2.3.3).

A focus on acculturation would tend to portray South Asian cultures as traditional, and UK/Western culture as modern, overlooking the complexities and contestations of gender norms across different cultural contexts (Brah 1996; Walton-Roberts and Pratt 2005). Often, the framing of cultures as 'dichotomous and oppositional, traditional or Western' fails to capture the 'complex realities of South Asian... everyday lives' (Ramji 2003:229). In studies of migration, scholars have urged against the portrayal of 'cultural understandings in immigrant families as overly static, consistent and uniformly shared by all members of a group' (Brah 1996; Nadim 2014:497). An acculturation approach might overlook gradual shifts towards gender equality within South Asian cultures, or may inadvertently portray such shifts as simply a Westernisation of South Asian cultures (Hunt et al. 2004; Lau 2005; Walton-Roberts and Pratt 2006). In contrast, foregrounding gender identity offers a means of understanding how South Asian women living in the UK are negotiating gender norms that are both deeply entrenched, yet dynamic and shifting, at the intersection of both South Asian and Western cultures.

This thesis acknowledges the significant contributions of post-assimilationist research in highlighting ethnic minority consumers' diverse experiences and positioning within different cultural contexts. Indeed, it shares the performative, 'multiple identities' approach to ethnic identity, which overlaps with a performative approach to gender identity. However, the thesis foregrounds the dynamic ways in which South Asian women negotiate their gender identities as mothers through everyday consumption practices. While acculturation is recognised as a part of this process, this study focuses on how South Asian women negotiate new gender identities, reproducing and challenging wider gender norms.

Section 2.4.2 considers the prevailing gender norms within South Asian cultures. The discussion focuses on how these gender norms shape women's gender socialisation and negotiation of their gender identities in South Asian families.

#### **2.4.2 South Asian context: Gender socialisation within South Asian family hierarchies**

The family has been recognised as a crucial site for examining the (re-)production of gender norms through everyday consumption practices involved in domestic and caring responsibilities (see section 2.3.2; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Hochschild 2003; Mehrotra and Calasanti 2010; Risman 2004; Thompson 1999). However, gender norms are also shaped by the cultural context in which they are produced. Section 2.4.2.1 discusses the dominant gender norms across South Asian cultures, notwithstanding the differences in language, religion, ethnicity and class that shape these gender norms. In doing so, the section also offers insight into the cultural context in which first-generation participants were raised. The following section (2.4.2.2) examines how such gender norms manifest themselves in the UK context, in which second- and third-generation participants were raised.

#### **2.4.2.1 Dominant South Asian gender norms within South Asian cultures**

South Asian cultures are largely based on collectivist rather than individualist ideals (Erdirishinga et al. 2015; Mehta and Belk 1991; Sekhon and Szmigin 2011). South Asian gender norms are therefore intertwined with collectivist ideals that shape family structures. Thus, people are more likely to conceive of themselves as interdependent or connected with others, rather than as independent individuals (Mehta and Belk 1991; Markus and Kitayama 1991).

An important aspect of South Asian collectivist values is the notion of filial piety (Erdirishinga et al. 2015). Filial piety involves a ‘non-obligatory, altruistic and unconditional material and emotional support for parents’ (Erdirishinga et al. 2015:479). Family responsibilities are central to South Asian identities through a combination of norms, values and practices such as taking care of parents, not being rebellious, and showing warmth and respect for parents (Erdirishinga et al. 2015; Mehrotra and Casalanti 2010). It is normal, if not expected, that close ties and ‘interdependent connectedness’ are maintained beyond immediate family to include extended family (Erdirishinga et al. 2015:479). South Asian families commonly emphasise ‘subordinating the individual self to the family unit’ (Mehrotra and Calasanti 2010:782).

Family members are also expected to accept their place within the family structure (Mehrotra and Casalanti 2010). Although family practices vary by ethnicity and location, South Asian cultures are characterised by the joint family structure or hierarchy (Allendorf 2015; Bhopal 1998). The most basic and common form of joint family hierarchy comprises a married couple, their children and the husband’s parents living together (Mehrotra and Casalanti 2010). The hierarchical nature of the joint family is exemplified through a woman’s life-course (ibid.; Bhopal 1998). When a young woman marries, she becomes a member of her



husband's family; usually the married couple live with the husband's parents and husband's siblings. At this stage, the young woman, as a daughter-in-law, is at the bottom of the gendered family hierarchy. Her status is lower than the women in her husband's family, while her mother-in-law is at the top (Bhopal 1998). As the young woman has children, and her husband's other siblings marry, the joint home may partition, with nuclear families often living near the paternal grandparents (Allendorf 2015). If the woman bears a son, this would bring her more status and respect, since the woman will eventually become a mother-in-law, and she will then assume her position at the top of the hierarchy (Bhopal 1998).

Although norms surrounding South Asian family hierarchies persist across South Asian cultures, wider cultural shifts are disrupting and altering family hierarchies, albeit at different rates (Dutta 2016; Joy et al. 2015). There is increasing migration from rural to urban contexts, and more women are entering education and the workforce, which has led to a rise in nuclear families moving away from the husband's parents (Erdirishingha et al. 2015). Despite these changes, the joint family is still often depicted as an ideal family form in public discourses, such as advertising and Bollywood films (Derné 2008).

Indeed, the joint family system has also been recognised as a patriarchal structure that can reinforce traditional gender norms in South Asian cultures (Allendorf 2015; Derné 2008; Mehrotra and Casalanti 2010). Husbands are breadwinners and heads of the household, while wives are 'primarily homemakers, even if they are employed' (Mehrotra and Casalanti 2010: 782). South Asian women largely remain responsible for domestic and childrearing responsibilities, as traditional gender norms persist (Derné et al. 2014; Joy et al. 2015). Daughters are often expected to help their mothers with the housework and childcare, particularly elder daughters (Chudgar and Shafiq 2010). Eldest daughters are sometimes

expected to drop out of school to help care for their siblings (Chudgar and Shafiq 2010; Lloyd et al. 2009).

Girls in South Asian cultures are typically socialised differently to boys (Joy et al. 2015). Their social movements are often far more restricted than their male siblings, for fear that daughters will bring shame to the family (ibid.). As part of the patriarchal norms embedded within the joint family structure, daughters may be ‘someone else’s property’, in the sense that their ‘whole socialisation process remains constructed as one long preparation to be a good wife and a good mother’ (Dutta 2016:171). Young South Asian women are also expected to ‘uphold a family’s religious and cultural integrity’, as symbols and guardians of family honour (Dwyer 2000:478). Daughters are typically socialised with the expectation to marry at a young age<sup>9</sup> and have children straight away (Bhopal 1997; Joy et al. 2015). Where daughters are encouraged to become educated and pursue a career, usually in middle and upper class families, they may still be expected to marry and quickly have children (Bhopal 1997; Joy et al. 2015). This thesis extends such literature by examining the extent to which first-generation migrants, who were raised with such gender norms, can negotiate and challenge these expectations to start a family immediately after marriage.

This section has outlined the dominant gender norms in South Asian cultures, offering insight into the cultural context in which first-generation participants were raised. The discussion has also provided a basis to understand how these norms manifest themselves in

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<sup>9</sup> Different cultures and regions have different views of when women are expected to marry. For example, the average age of marriage in Sri Lanka is 25 years, whereas the most women in rural Bangladesh are married before they are 20 years old (Caldwell 2005).

the UK context. Section 2.4.2.2 discusses how migration adds further complexities to the ways in which South Asian women living in the UK negotiate their gender identities.

#### **2.4.2.2 South Asian women negotiating gender identity in the UK**

This section examines existing literature on the how South Asian women living in the UK negotiate their gender identities. The first part focuses on research examining first-generation women who migrated to the UK, which helps to contextualise the experiences of first-generation participants in this study. The second part considers the context in which second- and third-generation South Asian women negotiate their gender identities.

First-generation South Asian women who come to the UK as adults are usually ‘marriage migrants’ (Dale 2008:4). These women’s family hierarchies are likely to have been disrupted by migration. Due to legal restrictions, first-generation migrants are now much less likely to be able to bring parents-in-law to live in the UK (Bhopal 1998; Dutta 2016). However, family hierarchies may persist, for example through other members of the extended family networks living in the UK. Often these women receive/make extended family visits from/to overseas family members, particularly when they become mothers. Widening internet access also enables frequent, cheap digital communications with their families in their country of origin (e.g. Skype).

First-generation South Asian migrants from urban, middle and upper class backgrounds are more likely to be educated and able to speak English when they migrate (Mehta and Belk 1991). Indeed, the first-generation women in this study hail from such backgrounds (see section 3.5 and Table 3.2). However, South Asian women who migrate from poorer backgrounds, with minimal English language skills, often marry into established, extended family hierarchies in the UK. These women are likely to negotiate gender norms rather

differently to the well-educated, middle- or upper-class women who migrated with their husbands as postgraduate students or professional migrants (section 3.6 offers reflections on the research sample).

Second (and subsequent) generations of South Asian women are likely to have been raised within some form of family hierarchy, however these hierarchies may also be undergoing changes (Bhopal 1998; Kandyoti 1988; McCartney and Gill 2007). Migration was less restricted in the post-war period until the 1970s, meaning that other family members were often able to migrate (Brah 1996; Sekhon and Szmigin 2011). In the decades following World War Two, the increased migration from South Asian countries to the UK was mainly linked to labour shortages that resulted in a glut of unskilled, manual jobs (see Brah 1996 for a detailed history). Typically, young men migrated, found work and saved funds so that their wives, parents and other family members could be supported, and could join them sooner or later (Brah 1996).

Studies of migration and ethnic identity have found that second-generation daughters tend to be strictly monitored, as they are given a specific role in preserving their family's ethnic identity (Dasgupta 1998:957). Young second-generation South Asian women are socialised to 'occupy a symbolic place as the guardian of family honour and integrity' (Dwyer 2000:478; Sekhon and Szmigin 2011). They are likely to have been socialised with traditional gender norms that are intertwined with South Asian family hierarchies (Bhopal 1997; 1998; discussed in section 2.4.2.1). Their mothers may have had to work to support the family, but are likely to have encountered the 'second shift' of housework and caring responsibilities (Dion and Dion 2001; Hochschild 1989). Research has suggested that even when South Asian fathers encouraged their second-generation daughters to become

educated, they did so mainly to ‘maintain or even elevate familial class status’ (Lindridge and Hogg 2006; Rajiva 2013:25).

At the same time, second-generation daughters may experience conflicting socialisation from their mothers who often act as ‘cultural gate-keepers’ of South Asian family values (Lindridge and Hogg 2006; Lindridge et al. 2004). Consumer research has suggested that consumption plays an important role in these women’s gender socialisation (Lindridge and Hogg 2006; Lindridge et al. 2004; Sekhon and Szmigin 2011). Such research has found that daughters must negotiate their mothers’ efforts to preserve South Asian traditions by exerting control over their daughters’ food, clothing, socialising, language and media usage (Lindridge and Hogg 2006; Lindridge et al. 2004). Even though they were derived from interviewing South Asian daughters, these findings are relevant here because they portray South Asian mothers as largely preserving cultural and religious heritage. This thesis extends such literature by examining the accounts of South Asian women as they become mothers. It does so by offering a more nuanced account of how these women negotiate the responsibilities of transmitting their cultural and religious heritage to their children as part of their gender identities as mothers.

Little is known about how motherhood affects South Asian women’s gender identity negotiations, and the extent to which these women are re-producing and challenging wider gender norms through mothering and consumption practices (Nadim 2014). Existing studies have tended to focus on access to higher education and how this affects these women’s negotiations of marriage. Section 2.4.3 positions the thesis in relation to such literature and suggests ways in which the thesis extends such research.

### **2.4.3 Negotiating new gender identities: from ‘docile young women’ to ‘pushing the boundaries’ of gender norms?**

Popular and academic interest in young South Asian women’s identities, especially Muslim women, has grown over the last decade, fuelled in part by the aftermath of the ‘war on terror’ and military intervention in Gulf countries (Ahmad 2001; Ramji 2007:1171). This section positions the thesis in relation to the growing body of research on ethnicity and gender, which argues that South Asian women are negotiating new identities and challenging gender norms (c.f. Ahmad 2001; Basit 1997; Franceschelli and O’Brien 2015; Jacobson 1997; Ramji 2007; Ray 2003; Shah et al. 2010). These studies call for a deeper understanding that goes beyond popular stereotypes of South Asian as ‘passive, repressed victims of patriarchal culture (Ramji 2007:1174) or as ‘docile young women’ (Bagguley and Hussain 2016:43), who are ‘uninterested in education and destined for arranged marriage (Ahmad 2001; Bhopal 1997; Dale et al. 2002; Ramji 2007:1174). This thesis responds to these calls by examining how South Asian women negotiate their gender identities through mothering and consumption practices, reproducing and challenging gender norms as they do so.

Most existing research focusses on South Asian women’s negotiations surrounding access to higher education and marriage. Such research is relevant to because it offers insight into how South Asian women are challenging gender norms as they negotiate their gender identities. Between 1979 and 2000 the proportion of South Asian women in the UK attending university dramatically increased (Bagguley and Hussain 2016). Early studies of South Asian women’s changing views on marriage and higher education suggest that higher levels of education were leading South Asian women to ‘reject a fundamental part of their cultural and social identity as South Asian women’ (Bhopal 1997:487; Bhopal 1998). South Asian women who pursued higher education were described as ‘deviant’ women who were renouncing ‘traditional’ values and ‘turning their back[s] on their culture’ (Bhopal 1997:

486; 488). Such an approach is limited in shedding light on how South Asian women negotiate their gender identities as mothers, as it offers a simplistic dichotomy of either conforming or rejecting South Asian cultural norms.

Subsequent research has found that South Asian women are not simply rejecting or seeking to escape their South Asian heritage, including arranged marriages (Ahmad 2001; 2012; Dwyer 2000; Bagguley and Hussain 2007). Rather, they are negotiating new gender identities in ways that are transforming gender norms and transcend binary oppositions such as traditional and Western (Bagguley and Hussain 2016; Dwyer 2000; Mohee 2011). South Asian women have been found to negotiate access to higher education and marriage, by becoming ‘pioneers’ who challenge gender norms (Dwyer 2000; Mohee 2011; Hussain and Bagguley 2007:10; 2016; Ramji 2007; Shah et al. 2010).

Such research posits that negotiations surrounding higher education are often intertwined with negotiations around marriage. Higher education enables young South Asian women to gain a sense of independence that will enable them to support themselves financially if necessary, for example if they were struggling to find a husband or there were marital problems (Ahmad 2001; Shah et al. 2010). While they are often encouraged to marry at a young age and start a family as soon as possible (Joy et al. 2015), having a career can offer a kind of ‘safety-net’ (Ahmad 2001:144). Negotiating access to higher education also enables South Asian women to delay their marriage (Bagguley and Hussain 2016; Mohee 2011). Studies have found that as South Asian women negotiate with their parents about where to study, where to live, and their degree subject choice, they are opening up new ways to negotiate their gender identities and challenge gender norms (Bagguley and Hussain 2016; Mohee 2011; Ramji 2007). Yet, little is known about how motherhood shapes these women’s negotiations of their gender identities. Motherhood is examined as an important site in which

South Asian women, many of whom are pushing the boundaries of gender norms, continue to do so as they become mothers.

Existing research on higher education and marriage suggests that South Asian women are positioned differently to negotiate their gender identities (Crozier and Davies 2006; Ramji 2007). For example, Shah et al. (2010) found that South Asian parents from a middle-class or urban context are likely to have high levels of social and cultural capital, which they mobilise to push their children into higher education. These authors also suggest that young South Asian women with working-class parents may lack the cultural capital to support their daughter's education. For example, their parents may not encourage their children to follow a study regime, or have the skills to research different educational institutions, funding and qualifications (Shah et al. 2010). In contrast, others (Ahmad 2001; Crozier and Davies 2006) have found that older siblings and wider family networks can overcome working-class parents' lack of cultural capital and can act as important role-models for daughters, even in working-class South Asian families.

These findings are highly relevant because they suggest that South Asian women may be socialised with different expectations surrounding their education, marriage and starting a family. As South Asian women become mothers, different forms of capital may shape their ability to challenge gender norms and negotiate new gender identities to different extents (see section 2.5.4). The thesis extends such literature by considering how South Asian women's previous ability to negotiate their gender identity (e.g. for higher education and/or marriage) may shape how they negotiate new gender identities as mothers.

Bagguley and Hussain's (2016) study offers a somewhat different approach to understand how some South Asian women can challenge gender norms as they negotiate their identities. They argue that South Asian women are 'skilled cultural navigators between their parental



culture and wider society' (Bagguley and Hussain 2016:47). The authors suggest that South Asian women, across different ethnicities and religions, engage in reflexivity that helps them to negotiate conflicting ideals, so that they can critically select aspects of gender norms to draw on or reject. Reflexively drawing on aspects of their cultural and religious heritage enabled these women to challenge gender norms by suppressing or deferring parental expectations for their marriage.

Bagguley and Hussain's (2016) study, much like Thompson and Üstüner's (2015) study on roller derby girls (see section 2.2.3), suggests that reflexivity is a key way in which women are challenging gender norms. Similarly, this thesis examines the ways in which South Asian women are reflexively drawing on their negotiations surrounding higher education and marriage as they become mothers. The thesis extends such research by examining how motherhood is also an important context in which South Asian women negotiate new gender identities and challenge gender norms through their consumption practices.

Section 2.5 elaborates further on how the concepts of reflexivity, habitus, fields and forms of capital can be incorporated into a performative approach to negotiating new gender identities.

## **2.5 Outlining a theoretical approach to negotiating new gender identities**

This section takes a performative approach to gender identity as its starting point, and outlines a theoretical approach to negotiating new gender identities. The discussion builds on previous sections (2.2.2.3; 2.2.3) which identified some shortcomings of a performative approach and outlines how they can be overcome (McNay 1999b; Magnus 2006; Thompson and Üstüner 2015). The section examines existing studies from sociology (c.f. Adkins 2003; McLeod 2005; McNay 1999a; Nentwich et al. 2015) and consumer research (c.f. Coskuner-

Balli and Thompson 2013; Thompson and Üstüner 2015) that incorporate the concepts of habitus, field, reflexivity and capital into a performative approach.

Butler's (1990) work on performativity emphasises gender identity as mutable and subversive, whereas Bourdieu's (1977) theories of habitus, field, reflexivity and capital are often associated with the ongoing reproduction and stability of social relations (Thorpe 2009; Nentwich et al. 2015). Yet these concepts have overlapping ideas that can be used together to develop a theoretical approach to negotiating new gender identities (MacLeod 2005; McNay 1999a). In this thesis, these concepts are used to examine how South Asian women are negotiating new gender identities through everyday mothering and consumption practices, reproducing and pushing the boundaries of gender norms as they do so.

Section 2.5.1 discusses the concepts of habitus and gendered habitus, suggesting that South Asian women's habitus is both iteratively performed, yet continually shaped by their gender socialisation and previous negotiations of gender identity. Section 2.5.2 outlines the concept of field, which is used to understand how South Asian women negotiate new gender identities at the intersection of several overlapping fields. Section 2.5.3 focuses on the concept of reflexivity, suggesting that reflecting on previous negotiations of gender identity may help South Asian women find new ways to challenge gender norms. Section 2.5.4 discusses how forms of capital might explain whether some women are better positioned than others to reflexively negotiate new gender identities and challenge gender norms.

### **2.5.1 Habitus and gendered habitus**

Bourdieu (1997) defines habitus as a set of assumptions, habits, taken for granted ideas and ways of being, with which individuals engage, understand and move through the world. It is 'a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences,

functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:18). Dispositions are 'inclinations, tendencies or propensities to believe, judge, feel and/or act in a certain way' (Trizzula et al. 2016:3). They can be viewed as durable ways in which gender norms become internalised so that they become 'predisposed ways' of being in the world, for example ways of talking, moving, making and doing things (Franceschelli 2013:40).

Bourdieu argues that dispositions are acquired mainly through individuals' primary socialisation. They are learned and repeated from a young age and throughout childhood, through family and schooling, so that they become familiar, even to an unconscious level (Trizzulla et al. 2016). Bourdieu (1990) posits that habitus can have an enduring quality that is relatively stable, although not entirely fixed (Adkins 2003). However, the dispositions that people acquire during their primary socialisation are also transposable: they shape our actions as we progress through life, such as the careers and lifestyles that we choose (Adkins 2003).

Habitus therefore shapes how individuals perceive the world and influences their actions (Uppalury and Racherla 2014), including their consumption practices. It provides a 'tacit sense of how the world works and one's place in this world' (Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013:693). In this thesis, the concept of habitus is used to suggest that South Asian women are likely to draw on their experiences of gender socialisation as they negotiate new gender identities as mothers. The idea that habitus shapes how we progress through life is also significant for this study. As South Asian women negotiate new gender identities as mothers, they may also draw on their earlier negotiations, such as access to higher education and marriage. Gaining insight into these women's gender socialisation and their journey to

motherhood may be important to develop a nuanced understanding of how they incorporate motherhood into their gender identities.

The notion of habitus also has implications for how we can theorise the possibilities for negotiating new gender identities. Habitus is often used to emphasise the enduring and unified aspects of primary socialisation, which has led some to view the concept of habitus as overly deterministic (Goldthorpe 2007; Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013). Others have argued that habitus is not ‘uniformly imposed’ or ‘fixed’, rather it is a ‘generative structure’ that organises our practices, which, in turn produce our dispositions (Adkins 2003; McLeod 2005:13). The temporal, generative dimension of habitus comes from the way that habitus ‘at every moment, structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences’ (Bourdieu 1992:60). Just as reiteration is a source for change in a performative approach, Bourdieu (1992) recognises that habitus can change and evolve. Habitus is generative because it generates ‘strategies’ that enable individuals to ‘cope with unforeseen circumstances and ever-changing situations’ (Bourdieu 1992:60). Since habitus generates numerous practices as individuals encounter different fields, it is ‘creative’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:19).

In contrast, Butler’s (1993) concept of performativity lacks an account of individuals’ creative capacity to actively negotiate ‘conflicting socio-cultural values’ (Magnus 2006; McNay 1999b:176). Instead, Butler (1993) views the performative as ‘a repetition...of the past’ (Butler 1993:244), with individuals being compelled to repeat gender norms in a rather static way (McNay 1999a). Butler (1993) offers little consideration of how gender identities are negotiated with ‘a practical reference’ to both the future and the past (McNay 1999a:102). Furthermore, performativity offers little insight into how the performative aspects of gender identity are ‘lived by individuals in relation to the web of social practices in which they are

enmeshed' (McNay 1999b:178). Thus, Butler's performative approach struggles to account for 'social and historical specificity' (McNay 199b:178), which is key to understanding South Asian women's position at the intersection of British and South Asian cultures.

The concept of habitus can help to counterbalance these shortfalls in Butler's (1993) performative approach (McNay 1999a; Thorpe 2009). Since habitus can be creative (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), gender identity and gender norms can also be understood as 'temporal and open-ended' (McNay 1999a:102). This open-ended aspect of negotiating gender identity is vital to understanding how gender norms can be simultaneously reproduced and slowly challenged (McLeod 2005; McNay 1999a). This view of habitus complements a performative approach: gender norms appear 'normal' or 'natural' because they have become part of individuals' dispositions and habitus, as part of their primary socialisation *and* constant reproduction through everyday practices (McNay 1999b). Both habitus and performativity support the notion that there is 'space for improvisation' in which new gender identities can emerge (McLeod 2005:14). This thesis examines the extent to which motherhood is a key context in which South Asian women are negotiating new gender identities. Through improvisations within everyday mothering and consumption practices, these women may both reproduce and challenge gender norms. In doing so, they may be slowly changing their (and their children's) habitus, for example if they socialise their children with gender norms that are rather different from their own upbringing.

Yet gender scholars have argued that Bourdieu (1997) falls short in considering the implications of gender within the concept of habitus (McLeod 2005; McNay 1999a; Thorpe 2009). To remedy this shortcoming, the term 'gendered habitus' has been developed to capture the inextricable relationship between gender, habitus and other social categories such as race and class (McLeod 2005; McNay 1999; Reay 1995; Skeggs 1997). Gendered habitus

helps us consider how gender norms and identities are formed in different contexts and from different positions within society (Reay 1995; Skeggs 1997). Gendered habitus reflects the social, cultural and class relations of the context in which they are acquired and reproduced (Franceschelli 2013) and can ‘provide a powerful analysis of the persistence of difference and inequality’ (McLeod 2005:20). For example, Thompson and Üstüner’s (2015) study of roller derby girls found that their gendered habitus continued to shape ways in which these women could challenge dominant gender norms of womanhood. In this thesis, gendered habitus is used to consider how South Asian women are negotiating their gender identities within South Asian family hierarchies, despite the persistence of traditional gender norms. Alongside the concept of field, gendered habitus is used to consider the different positions from which South Asian women negotiate their gender identities as mothers.

### **2.5.2 Field**

Bourdieu’s (1993) concept of field is inextricably linked with the concept of gendered habitus, and is used in this thesis to understand the context in which South Asian women are negotiating new gender identities. A major premise of Bourdieu’s (1993) theories is that habitus develops in a dynamic relation with social fields (McLeod 2005; Thorpe 2009). Field is the social space in which habitus operates (McNay 1999). Bourdieu views society as being comprised of various overlapping fields that are relatively autonomous and have their own logic, for example, the economic field, the family field, the work field (Adkins 2003; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Trizzulla et al. 2016).

Fields are characterised by rules and hierarchical relations in which individuals compete for ‘desirable resources’ (Franceschelli and O’Brien 2015:699). The rules are the norms that regulate the relations between individuals within the field (Franceschelli and O’Brien 2015). To navigate the rules of conduct, individuals require specific skills that can help them to

determine which moves in the field will be ‘regarded as legitimate and status enhancing’ (Arsell and Thompson 2011:793). Bourdieu uses the metaphor of a ‘game’ to explain the concept of field: a field is a social arena where individuals develop a ‘feel for the game’ by competing for different types of capital (Franceschelli and O’Brien 2015:699; see section 2.5.4). An individual’s position within a field depends on their ability to accrue, convert and invest forms of capital (Holt 1997).

Gendered habitus is formed through interactions within and across different fields, as individuals learn the ‘rules of the game’ (Bourdieu 1990; McLeod 2005:13; Reay 1995). The ‘space for improvisation’ within one’s gendered habitus arises in relation to the various social fields we inhabit (McLeod 2005:14). Gender norms can be understood as a key part of all fields (Adkins 2004; McNay 1999a), since ‘all fields contain and enforce a set of gender rules’ (Thorpe 2009:497). Some gender norms are ‘common to many other fields’, whereas others may be ‘specific to that field’ (Thorpe 2009:497). In this thesis, the concepts of gendered habitus and field are used to understand how South Asian women are negotiating deeply ingrained yet slowly changing gender norms across different social fields.

Indeed, South Asian women can be understood as positioned within multiple, overlapping fields. For example, as these women negotiate access to university and enter the workforce, they are moving between the family field and the fields of education and work (Franceschelli and O’Brien 2014; Uppalury and Racherla 2014). They are also moving between wider South Asian cultural and religious fields and British cultural fields (Franceschelli and O’Brien 2014; Lindridge et al. 2006). Through moving across these multiple fields, they could draw on their experiences to negotiate their position within the family field. For women in this study, the ‘rules of the game’ in the family field are likely to be embodied within the gender norms of South Asian family hierarchies. Although traditional gender

norms may persist within family hierarchies, the thesis considers whether becoming a mother enables South Asian women opportunities to improvise and challenge gender norms within the family hierarchy.

Opportunities for improvisation tend to arise when there are ‘disjunctures’ between overlapping fields, which ‘can generate change and transformation’ (Reay 2004:436). Some have argued that when women enter the workforce after becoming a mother, they may experience tensions between the family and work fields (Adkins 2004; McNay 1999). Women’s ‘expectations and dispositions’ formed within the family field may ‘sit uneasily’ with the ‘objective requirements of the workplace’ (Adkins 2004; McNay 1999a:110). Moving between these fields may make these women more aware of conflicts between different fields and their gendered habitus (Adkins 2004; McNay 1999a; Thorpe 2009). Little is known about the extent to which South Asian women may experience such conflicts as they become mothers, moving between the fields of family and work. Nor do we know how South Asian women’s gendered habitus is shaped by any previous tensions that they have encountered, for example when moving between the fields of family and higher education.

These moments of tension that arise from the intersection of overlapping fields create possibilities for change because they prompt reflexivity (McNay 1999), as section 2.5.3 discusses.

### **2.5.3 Reflexivity**

The concept of reflexivity emerged as part of theories of reflexive modernisation and critical realism (Archer 2007; Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; Heelas 1996; Lash and Urry 1994). Although there are different approaches to defining reflexivity (c.f. Archer 2007; Beck 1992; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Giddens 1991; Heelas 1996; McNay 1999), they converge



around the notion that each of us constructs our identity as a reflexive project (see Adams 2006; Farrugia 2013 for a detailed discussion). The notion of a reflexive identity project means that each of us ‘lives a biography’ in which the question ‘how shall I live’ has to be answered in day-to-day decisions’ (Giddens 1991:14). Being reflexive means that ‘people have to turn to their own resources to decide what they value...and to make sense of their lives’ (Heelas 1996:5).

The notion of reflexive identity projects overlaps with consumer research that purports that consumption can play a key role in consumers’ (reflexive) identity projects (see section 2.2.3). Reflexivity has been used to understand how individuals negotiate new identities, both in consumer research (c.f. Castilhos and Fonesca 2016; Chytkova 2011; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Thompson and Üstüner 2015) and sociological research (c.f. Adams 2006; Brooks and Wee 2008; McNay 1999a; Miller 2005; Williams 2008).

When combined with gendered habitus and field, reflexivity can explain why moving between fields can open the possibility for new gender identities to emerge. Bourdieu (1977) purports that reflexivity can arise from a ‘lack of fit between habitus and field’ (Adkins 2003:26). However, Bourdieu (1998) regarded disjunctures between habitus and field as relatively rare occurrences. He emphasises that ‘most people tend to remain within compatible fields most of the time’, meaning that there is usually a fit between habitus and field (Bourdieu 1998; Chambers 2005:340). For Bourdieu (1998), reflexivity emerges from feelings of dissonance, in a piecemeal affair, and is not simply an innate capacity within individuals (McNay 1999a).

Others have argued that Bourdieu has failed to examine the full extent to which reflexivity can enable individuals to negotiate new gender identities and challenging gender norms (McNay 1999a:107; Thorpe 2009). Several studies suggest that Bourdieu’s (1998) view of

reflexivity resembles Butler's (1997) performative approach to gender identity (Adkins 2003; Kenway and McLeod 2004; McLeod 2005; McNay 1999a; Thorpe 2009). Moments of reflexivity may be unpredictable and unintended, meaning that changes may be slow, but radical. Such research suggests that reflexivity brings about a heightened awareness of the gender norms within both gendered habitus and the various fields that one inhabits (Adams 2006; McNay 1999a; Thompson and Üstüner 2015). The reflexive awareness of gender norms opens the possibility of negotiation, change and resistance, as reflexivity 'allows us to alter our perception of the situation and thereby our reaction to it' (Adams 2006; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:36; Thorpe 2008). The concept of reflexivity is used in this thesis to examine the ways in which South Asian women become reflexively aware of gender norms as they negotiate mothering and consumption practices.

Bagguley and Hussain (2016) posit that reflexivity plays a significant role in South Asian women's negotiations surrounding access to higher education. They found that young South Asian women occupy a marginal social position, in which they could reflexively and skilfully negotiate aspects of their parental culture and religion. Reflexivity surrounding higher education enabled these women to transform gender norms by delaying and negotiating their marriage. This thesis extends Bagguley and Hussain's (2016) study, using the concept of reflexivity to consider whether South Asian women continue to do so as they become mothers.

Some gender scholars (McNay 1999a; Thorpe 2009) have suggested that women are more likely than men to negotiate dissonance as they move across different fields. For example, Thompson and Üstüner (2015) argued that consumption within a specific field prompted women to become reflexive in other consumption fields, which enabled them to challenge gender norms in subtle ways. Motherhood has been widely recognised as prompting such

reflexivity, as women become increasingly likely to move across the family, work and education fields (McNay 1999a; Miller 2005; Mitchell and Green 2002; Sullivan 2004). Miller (2005:17) found that for the white, middle-class women in her study, reflexivity was ‘an important device’ to help make sense of motherhood’, particularly when there was a gap between their expectations and experiences.

Yet little is known about how reflexivity might enable ethnic minority consumers to pursue new gender identities and challenge gender norms as they become mothers. As Miller (2005:17) notes, reflexivity is ‘experienced and practised in different ways in different contexts’ (Miller 2005:17). Reflexivity may not be universally experienced, and may often both reproduce and challenge gender norms in uneven, piecemeal ways (Adams 2006). An important implication of the relationship between reflexivity, gendered habitus and fields is that ‘reflexive awareness does not simply equate with the ability to transform one’s situation in every context’ (Adams 2006:522).

The context of motherhood exemplifies how reflexivity alone may not always be enough for women to be able to negotiate their gender identities. Mitchell and Green’s study (2002:10) of working-class white mothers found that motherhood did generate reflexivity of gender norms. However, the mothers lacked the ‘socio-economic resources and opportunities’ to be able to change their gender identity. Indeed, it was ‘*via* the reflexive awareness’ that the women perceived a lack of life-chances for themselves (Adams 2006:524). Motherhood generated reflexivity which had ‘important ramifications’ for their self-esteem and aspirations (Mitchell and Green 2002:121). It seems that reflexivity during motherhood may not always bring choice, but ‘a painful awareness of the lack of it’ (Adams 2006:525). Just as reflexivity may prompt some South Asian women to challenge gender norms, it could also heighten these women’s perception of a lack of choice. Their ability to act on such

reflexivity may also be shaped by their ability to mobilise and convert different forms of capital.

#### **2.5.4 Forms of Capital**

Bourdieu posits that different positions are available within fields, with individuals often struggling for different types of capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Franceschelli 2013). Strategies must be developed through which individuals compete for various forms of social, cultural and symbolic capital that enable them to maintain or improve their position within the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Economic capital is most readily converted into money; social capital refers to valued networks of relationships; cultural capital comprises education and legitimate knowledge; and symbolic capital encapsulates honour and prestige (Bourdieu 1986; Franceschelli 2013). These different forms of capital are interlinked and convertible into other forms of capital (Erel 2010).

Studies of South Asian women and higher education have suggested that women from different class positions mobilise forms of capital to differing extents. For example, young Pakistani Muslim women from poor backgrounds may find that their parents lack the economic capital to support their children, but they may be able to mobilise other forms of capital to help their daughters achieve their aspirations (Shah et al. 2010). For example, information and advice regarding university from family members can be an important source of social capital for South Asian families (Crozier and Davies 2006; Shah et al. 2010). Ramji (2007) found that young Muslim women accrue Islamic cultural capital by learning more about their religion, and how Islam encourages women to become educated. Such cultural capital enables them to challenge dominant interpretations of Islam, so that they can pursue careers and become more upwardly mobile than their male Muslim counterparts

(Ramji 2007). These findings are relevant to this thesis, as these forms of capital may also shape South Asian women's mothering practices.

An individual's position within and across social fields is shaped by their ability to 'strategize' about how best to convert and employ their capital (Erel 2010:647). Erel (2010:647) posits that the capacity to move within and across different fields is also linked to 'an individual's social trajectory' of gaining and converting capital. Similarly, Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013) suggest that white, middle-class men who became at-home fathers could draw on and mobilise forms of capital that they accrued from their previous dominant position as male breadwinners (see section 2.2.3). Such research is relevant to this thesis, as it suggests that the family field, and motherhood are key consumption sites in which multiple forms of capital circulate.

Consumer research (c.f. Arsell and Thompson 2011; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; McAlexander et al 2014; Thompson and Üstüner 2015; Üstüner and Holt 2007) posits that consumers who occupy a minority or low status position within social fields may find it more difficult to mobilise forms of capital and negotiate new identities. Üstüner and Holt (2007) examined how young Turkish women migrated from a poor, rural upbringing to become squatters on the outskirts of a modern, city. The young women distanced themselves from their native minority cultural field, but were also unable to achieve their ideal of becoming a modern (Batici) Turkish woman in the dominant cultural field, as they occupied a disadvantaged position as poor squatters. These women found themselves experiencing a status of being 'betwixt and between', which resulted in them experiencing 'shattered identities' (Üstüner and Holt 2007:55).

In contrast, this thesis seeks to examine whether South Asian women, as ethnic minority consumers, can continue to challenge gender norms as they negotiate new gender identities

as mothers. It considers how these women draw on their habitus and trajectories (Erel 2010) to motherhood, including their reflexive accounts of converting and investing different forms of capital, as they negotiate their gender identities across multiple social fields. By combining a performative approach with the concepts of habitus, capital, field and reflexivity, the thesis examines how South Asian women negotiate new gender identities through their mothering and consumption practices, both during the transition to motherhood and beyond. This approach enables the thesis to consider whether some South Asian women may be better positioned than others to negotiate new gender identities and challenge gender norms.

## **2.6 Concluding remarks to this chapter**

This chapter has positioned the thesis in relation to existing consumer research on negotiating new gender identities. Section 2.2 evaluated the two main approaches to negotiating gender identity: a social performance approach to gender identity, and a performative approach. Section 2.3 presented motherhood as a key site in which traditional gender norms both persist, yet are changing. The discussion considered how research on the transition to motherhood, everyday mothering practices and intensive motherhood has largely overlooked the experiences of women from ethnic minority backgrounds. Section 2.4 reviewed consumer research on negotiating gender identity at the intersection of two cultures, with a focus on South Asian women living in the UK. While most research assumes an acculturation approach to examine multiple identities, this thesis foregrounds gender identity and takes a performative approach. Section 2.5 outlined how theories of gendered habitus, field, reflexivity and capital can help to overcome the shortcomings of a performative approach. This combined theoretical approach is used to develop a nuanced understanding of how South Asian women may draw on and challenge gender norms through everyday mothering and consumption practices.

The following chapter (Chapter 3) outlines the research methodology for this study. The subsequent two chapters present the research findings. The theoretical approach developed in section 2.5 suggests that South Asian women are likely to reflect on their gender socialisation and previous negotiations of their gender identity as they incorporate motherhood into their gender identities. Indeed, such reflections were a key part of participants' accounts as they sought to make sense of their experiences. Accordingly, the findings of this study are organised into two chapters. Chapter 4 considers participants' accounts of their 'trajectories' (Erel 2010:647) or journeys to motherhood, examining women's gender socialisation and negotiations surrounding higher education, marriage and starting a family. Chapter 5 considers participants' accounts of how they incorporated motherhood into their gender identities. The chapter highlights how participants were reflexively drawing on their gender socialisation and journeys to motherhood (presented in Chapter 4) to incorporate motherhood into their gender identities.

## **Chapter 3      Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The research methodology is guided by both the aims of this study, and the ontological and epistemological stance of the researcher (Crotty 2006; Goulding 1999). This chapter elaborates on how the researcher's worldview and the research aims both informed the research methodology (Goulding 1999; Guba and Lincoln 1994). Section 3.2 outlines the research paradigm in which the study is grounded. Section 3.3 outlines the research methods used in this study. Section 3.4 discusses the research journey, including data collection and analysis, while section 3.5 offers a profile of the research participants. Section 3.6 offers methodological reflections on the thesis.

### **3.2 Research paradigm**

This section discusses the research paradigm that has been adopted for this research. Section 3.2.1 introduces the notion of ontological and epistemological stance as a means of establishing the philosophical underpinning of the research. The following sections outline the stance taken in this research. Section 3.2.2 outlines how the thesis assumes a social constructionist approach, while section 3.2.3 positions the research within interpretivist consumer research. In particular, section 3.2.4 presents an existential phenomenological approach as an appropriate means to examine the negotiation of gender identity for South Asian mothers living in the UK.

#### **3.2.1 Ontological and Epistemological Stance**

Ontology denotes our understanding of 'what is', how we understand 'the nature of existence' (Crotty 2006:10). All research within the social sciences 'make ontological assumptions about the nature of reality and social beings' (Hudson and Ozanne 1988:509).



Epistemology refers to ‘a way of understanding and explaining what we know’, requiring researchers to clarify their understanding of ‘what human knowledge is’ (Crotty 2006:2-3). Often, when clarifying one’s ontological and epistemological stance, it can be difficult to ‘keep ontology and epistemology apart conceptually’ (Crotty 2006:10). Certainly, the two are linked, since ‘to talk of the construction of meaning is to talk of the construction of meaningful reality’ (ibid.). As such, ontological and epistemological issues often ‘emerge together’ (Crotty 2006:10; Schwandt 2003).

This study assumes a social constructionist ontology and epistemology. The exploratory nature of this study fits closely with the aims of discovery rather than verification (Pidgeon 1996). A social constructionist ontology proposes that our very understanding of reality is a social construction, shaped by our interpretation of the world (Nightingale and Cromby 2002). The way that we understand the world is situated and constructed not in isolation, but ‘against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, languages and so forth’ (Schwandt 2003:197). In a social constructionist approach, the ontological and epistemological are intertwined, since our understanding of what constitutes reality (‘what is’) is constructed socially through our interpretations (Crotty 2006). Section 3.2.2 further outlines social constructionism as the ontological and epistemological stance which forms the basis of interpretivist consumer research.

### **3.2.2 Social Constructionism and consumer research**

Social constructionism stands in contrast to both objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivist epistemologies are based on the view that ‘meaning exists in objects independently of any consciousness’ (Crotty 2006:10). In objectivist epistemology, it is the objects themselves that hold the meaning, and the role of research is to reveal the objective, ‘true’ meaning possessed by an object (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Consumer research with an objectivist

epistemology aims to explain phenomena by identifying variables, with the goal of prediction (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). From an objectivist epistemology, knowledge and facts are derived through rigorous, controlled and planned investigations and precise measurements (Thompson 1991).

At the other extreme, subjectivism purports that all meaning is created by the (human) subject and imposed on the object under study (Rorty 1979; Thompson 1991). For the subjectivist consumer researcher, meaning is constructed in the mind of the individual. Subjectivist consumer research aims to understand how consumers construct meaning for themselves (Hudson and Murray 1986). Such understanding is derived from gaining ‘an empathetic understanding of the subject’s experiences’ (Thompson 1991:64).

In contrast, social constructionism is based on the understanding that meaning is constructed through engaging with the world (Crotty 2006). Social constructionism purports that meanings are interwoven and co-constructed through interactions within our socio-historical and cultural context (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). For consumer researchers who assume a social constructionist stance, the context in which a consumer is situated is important. This is because ‘people *actively* create and interact’ with the world, they both shape and are shaped by the backdrop of their socio-cultural context (Hudson and Ozanne 1988:510).

The main topic of inquiry in this thesis is gender identity, as a socially constructed entity rather than a ‘given’. As discussed in section 2.2, this research defines gender identity as not fixed or static, but interpreted and negotiated in multiple ways (Butler 1990). An objectivist stance would regard gender identity as part of an objective reality that is fixed. Such a stance would offer little basis to understand how gender identities and gender norms can be negotiated and changed. However, a subjectivist stance would offer more possibilities to consider how gender is negotiated. Taking a subjectivist approach would view individuals

as constructing their own subjective meanings of gender (Edley and Wetherell 1996; Hein 2010). Yet a subjectivist stance would struggle to account for how subjectively constructed understandings of gender are shared and constructed within a particular socio-historical and cultural context (Edley and Wetherell 1996; Hein 2010).

A social constructionist stance overcomes these shortcomings, by acknowledging that individuals negotiate gender identities both subjectively, but also ‘inter-subjectively’ (Edley and Wetherell 1996; Tadejewski 2006:430). From a social constructionist perspective, gender identity is socially constructed by individuals, but is embedded within contexts and shaped by interactions with others. Gender is socially constructed to the extent that individuals are both producers and products of gender (Butler 1990; Edley and Wetherell 1996; Hein 2010; see section 2.2). This thesis therefore assumes a social constructionist stance, as it offers an appropriate ontological and epistemological basis for understanding how consumers negotiate gender identities within a sociocultural context.

Within social constructionism lies interpretivist research (Crotty 2006). The dominant research paradigm within marketing and consumer research is positivism, which assumes an objectivist stance (Thompson et al. 1989). However, against a backdrop of an ‘interpretive turn’ within the wider social sciences, consumer researchers have begun to consider alternative ways of understanding consumer behaviour (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Sherry 1991). Interpretive consumer research has emerged in opposition to the positivistic aims of measurement and prediction (Hudson and Ozanne 1988).

### **3.2.3 Interpretivist consumer research**

The aim of interpretivist consumer research is to interpret consumers' experiences to generate knowledge (Thompson et al. 1989). However, the term 'interpretivism' is sometimes used differently in consumer research, by both those who accept and use the term (Cova and Elliot 2008; Goulding 1999; Spiggle 1994; Tadejewski 2006), and by those who critique the term (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Belk et al. 2013). For example, the term 'interpretivism' is often used to refer to 'all qualitative work' in consumer research (Belk et al. 2013:20). On the other hand, some researchers refer to a 'post-modern' turn in consumer research, while others refer to an 'interpretive turn' (Cova and Elliot 2008). Thus, it appears that the term 'interpretivism' is used differently by researchers as they adopt different, yet overlapping variants of interpretive research (Goulding 1999).

In this thesis, interpretivism is viewed as a particular branch of social constructionist epistemology (Crotty 2006). Interpretive consumer researchers construct knowledge by interpreting how consumers make sense of their world (Thompson 1991; Thompson 1997). Rather than having one true or final interpretation (Thompson 1991), interpretive consumer research proposes that interpretations and understandings are shaped by context and are subject to re-interpretation (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Interpretations are, instead produced or constructed by both the researcher and the participant, as their 'horizons' or perspectives overlap (Thompson et al. 1994). Since the primary goal of interpretivist research is 'understanding' (Hudson and Ozanne 1988:510), such a stance is well-suited to the exploratory aims of this study. Interpretivist consumer research offers a means of understanding how South Asian women living in the UK are negotiating their gender identity through their consumption and within a particular context.

This thesis is situated within a particular strand of interpretivist consumer research, which draws on existential phenomenology. Section 3.2.4 outlines existential phenomenology as an appropriate research paradigm for understanding of how consumers negotiate their gender identity as part of their lived experiences.

### **3.2.4 Phenomenology and Existential Phenomenology**

Within interpretive consumer research, existential phenomenology is a highly influential research methodology for understanding the role of consumption in negotiating consumers' identities (Askegaard and Linnet 2011). Existential phenomenology 'blends' existential philosophy with the 'research methods of phenomenology' (Thompson et al. 1989:133). This section begins by briefly outlining the key tenets of phenomenology that led to the emergence of existential phenomenology, and how they inform this study.

Founded by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), phenomenology is the study of human experience (Moran 2000). According to Husserl, phenomenology aims to 'describe what is given to us in experience without obscuring preconceptions or hypothesis speculations' (Barrett 1990:213). In pursuing these aims, Husserl proposed 'a new way of doing philosophy' (Moran 2000:1). His radical concept of phenomenology sought not to make 'intellectual speculations about the whole of reality', but to 'turn...to a pure description of what is' (Barrett 1990:214). Husserl's motto was that philosophers must return 'to the things themselves' (Barrett 1990:213). Husserl's concept of phenomenology is best understood as:

...a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophising, which emphasises the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that

is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer (Moran 2000:4).

Husserl's approach was radical because it proposed that philosophy should be based on experience, rather than through intellectual contemplation (Moran 2000). Phenomenology studies 'the way things present themselves to us in and through experience' (Sokolowski 2000:2). Through studying how things present themselves to human consciousness, phenomenology rejects the ontological separation of reality and experience (Cope 2005). Rather than focussing on distinctions between an 'inner world' of private experiences and an 'outer world' real objects (Hammond et al. 1992:1), phenomenologists study the experience itself, and how participants interpret their experiences.

As a key part of phenomenology, Husserl developed the concept of 'life-world' (or 'Lebenswelt') to denote 'the world of ordinary, immediate experience' (Cope 2005:7). The 'life-world' is the 'world in which we are always already living' (Moran 2000:12); it is the 'background for all human endeavours, the concrete context of all experience' (Cope 2005:7).

Yet Husserl believed that phenomenologists must separate or isolate themselves from the life-world that is under investigation (Moran 2005). In order to offer a thorough description of experience (i.e. to get back to 'the things themselves'), Husserl proposed that one must question or suspend one's knowledge and suppositions about the phenomenon (Cope 2005; Moran 2000). Phenomenologists believe that by putting our 'prevailing understandings' of phenomena to one-side, and revisiting 'our immediate experience of them, possibilities for new meaning emerge' (Crotty 2006:78).

This process of suspension or laying aside beliefs is referred to as ‘bracketing’ (or epoché). The aim is to enable commonly held beliefs to be suspended ‘until they can be established on a firmer basis’ so that one can ‘open oneself to a phenomenon and view each experience in its own right’ (Cope 2005:7). By bracketing everyday knowledge, Husserl argued that phenomenologists can become ‘detached observers of the passing scene’ (Sokolowski 2000:48). Husserl regarded bracketing as a reductive process (Sokolowski 2000). Through detached observation and description, Husserl believed that phenomenology could reveal the ‘essential elements of the phenomenon in question’ (Cope 2005:7).

Husserl’s concepts of ‘life-world’ and ‘bracketing’ were highly influential, providing a point of departure for existential scholars such as Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty (Barratt 1990; Moran 2005). These scholars suggested that it was not possible for researchers to ‘bracket’ or isolate themselves from their and their participants’ life-worlds (Cope 2005). Existential phenomenology is based on the notion that human beings can only be understood as part of the world in which they live and cannot be studied separately from their environment, or vice versa (Thompson et al. 1989). Rather, they exist in the world as a ‘totality’, through the notion of ‘human-being-in-the-world’ (Barratt 1990; Thompson et al. 1989:135).

In existential terms, human beings construct their identities ‘under conditions of *thrownness*’, situated in a ‘world of pre-existing cultural meanings and social conditions’ (Thompson 1996:389). Existential phenomenological research actively draws on the situated-ness in the construction of knowledge (Hammond et al. 1992). Nevertheless, existential phenomenologists share Husserl’s emphasis on the careful description of phenomena (Hammond et al. 1992).

Through extending Husserl's concept of 'life-world', the main endeavour of existential phenomenology is to describe the 'lived experiences' of people (Cope 2005; Thompson et al. 1989). Existential phenomenology research places primacy on understanding how individuals construct their identity from personal, symbolic meanings within their life-world (Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Thompson 1996; Thompson et al. 1990).

For consumer researchers, the focus of existential phenomenology is on the 'life-world' and the lived experiences of the consumer (Thompson et al. 1989:135). Existential phenomenology enables consumer researchers to assume a holistic approach, which takes into account the context in which consumers are situated (Thompson et al. 1989). Such an approach is particularly useful when there is 'little known' about a phenomenon or life-world (Appleton 1995:933). Since there is little consumer research on how ethnic minority consumers negotiate their gender identity as they become mothers, an existential phenomenology stance seems well-suited to this study's research aims.

Although existential phenomenology does not support phenomenology's notion of fully 'bracketing' the life-world, some form of 'purposeful bracketing' is usually required during data collection and early data analysis (Cope 2005:17; Thompson et al. 1989). Existential phenomenologists use 'purposeful bracketing' of 'preconceived theoretical notions about the phenomena...such as a theoretical model or hypothesis' (Thompson et al. 1989:140). The existential phenomenologist places primacy on participants' first-hand accounts of their experiences by carefully capturing a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973).

In the context of this research, purposeful bracketing meant that the researcher bracketed any theoretical suppositions or ideas about what motherhood 'should' be like for South Asian mothers living in the UK, rather than imposing any theories from existing research. Throughout the data collection process primacy was given to participants and their



experiences. As phenomenology requires, participants' descriptions and interpretations were the main focus of study. Participants were regarded as experts on their own lives (Thompson et al. 1990). The focus was on participants and their experiences of being a South Asian woman living in the UK and becoming a mother. The researcher's beliefs and assumptions, as well as those found in existing research, were secondary to participants' experiences and interpretations.

The researcher acted as a tool, interacting with participants to enable participants to make sense of their experiences. Reflecting the social constructionist foundations of the research, meaning was constructed through an interaction between the researcher and the participant. The researcher sought to give meaning to the participants' interpretations as part of data analysis, by drawing on participants' stories as descriptions of their 'lived experiences' (Thompson et al. 1989).

Existential phenomenological research involves a 'two-stage' interpretation process: the researcher remains in-the-world, but also interprets participants' interpretations of their experiences (Belk et al. 2013; Hirschman 1986; Smith and Osborn 2003). Through making sense of participants' interpretations, researchers construct knowledge (Belk et al. 2013; Thompson 2007). Participants were encouraged to freely express their experiences and the stories of participants are retold and interpreted using their own words. Existing literature did not dictate the process and content of data collection, nor the themes that emerged from the data. Rather, data collection progressed and evolved through participants' interpretations of their experiences. Emergent themes then guided the researcher to engage in subsequent literature reviews (Hirschman 1992; Thompson 1996). Further discussion of the data collection and analysis process are outlined in section 3.4.

This section has outlined the research paradigm for the thesis, including how both the researcher's worldview and research aims have shaped the philosophical underpinnings of the study. Section 3.3 addresses the research methods used for data collection, which were based on a qualitative approach and involved in-depth phenomenological interviews.

### **3.3 Research Methods**

The research methods used for this study were carefully aligned with the research paradigm, but were also 'sensitive to the social context in which the data are produced' (Sokladaris 2009:721). To gain a thorough and careful description of the phenomenon studied, research methods need to be flexible and give opportunity for participants to express their experiences in their own words (Sokladaris 2009). This section outlines how the research methods were appropriate for the aims and context of this study. The methods used for generating data enabled a rich description of participants' lived experiences of their gender identity negotiations to emerge.

#### **3.3.1 A qualitative approach**

Phenomenological research is 'inherently qualitative' and not concerned with gathering statistics (Cope 2005:9; Catterall 1998). Qualitative methods do not offer an objective description of phenomena, but are geared towards providing a nuanced understanding of the complexity of consumers' experiences (Thompson et al. 1989). In qualitative research the aim is to show how meaning is constructed, rather than providing predictive, generalizable knowledge (Schwandt 2003). A qualitative research approach is therefore closely aligned with existential-phenomenological enquiry. This is captured in Van Mannen's (1983:9) definition of qualitative research:

It is at best an umbrella term covering an array of techniques which seek to describe, code, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.

A qualitative approach is particularly suited to this exploratory study, as it enables participants to express their experiences in their own words. Furthermore, qualitative methods are ‘better suited to understand the meanings, interpretations and subjective experiences’ of groups who may be ‘marginalised’ or ‘hard to reach’ (Bhopal 2010:189). Since this study focusses on South Asian women living in the UK, qualitative methods seemed to offer the most appropriate means to research the gender identity negotiations of ethnic minority consumers. In particular, the study drew on in-depth phenomenological interviews as the most appropriate qualitative research method.

### **3.3.2 In-depth phenomenological interviews**

In-depth phenomenological interviews are frequently used in interpretive consumer research (Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Thompson et al. 1989). The process of conducting in-depth phenomenological interviews is not based on a single approach, meaning that consumer researchers have developed various ways of interviewing (c.f. Belk et al. 2013; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Thompson and Üstüner 2015). The in-depth phenomenological interview has been regarded as ‘a powerful – if not the most powerful tool’ for capturing descriptions of participants’ understandings of their lived experiences (Moisander et al. 2009:333).

Furthermore, in-depth phenomenological interviews are particularly useful and easier to conduct when researching in an ‘unfamiliar’ cultural context, because ‘everything is new

and different' (Belk et al. 2013:32). As a white, British woman, the researcher in this study does not share the ethnic background of the participants in this study, but she does have 'some common basis of understanding' (Belk et al. 2013:32) as a woman and as a mother. Thus, in-depth phenomenological interviews offered the most appropriate means for participants to freely share their experiences of their gender identity negotiations.

As part of in-depth phenomenological interviews, participant and researcher are positioned as equal, with primacy placed on participants' experiences and concepts (Thompson et al. 1990). Individual in-depth interviews were therefore better suited than group interviews or focus groups, because they were better able to provide participants with a safe, comfortable environment in which they could share any sensitive personal reflections (Bhopal 2010). Ensuring that participants felt able to reflect on issues that are 'taken for granted or assumed' is particularly important when researching ethnic minority participants (Bhopal 2010:193). Section 3.3.4 further elaborates on the research ethics process, while section 3.4.1 discusses the interviewing process in more detail.

To summarise, in-depth phenomenological interviews were selected as the most appropriate method for data collection. This method was closely aligned with the research paradigm, aims of the study and participants' wellbeing. The remainder of section 3.3 outlines further aspects of the research methods used, including the sampling strategy (section 3.3.3) and research ethics (section 3.3.4).

### **3.3.3 Sampling strategy**

The sampling strategy adopted in this study reflects the exploratory aims of the research. The thesis does not intend to produce a statistically reliable and representative sample base. Rather, the aim is to provide a rich insight into the lived experiences of South Asian women

living in the UK as they become mothers. Therefore, this study employed a purposive sampling strategy to recruit participants in order to fulfil the research aims (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Miles and Huberman 1984; Smith et al. 2009).

This study sought to recruit South Asian women living in the UK. The thesis recognises that ethnicity is socially constructed and located (Brah 2010). In the context of this research, ethnicity is regarded not as an essential category, or a 'given', but as a social category that is in a constant state of production and negotiation with other forms of difference (Brah 2010; Dekel 2013). In order to pursue the research aims, it was necessary to make use of social categories of ethnicity, race and religion, whilst recognising that their use was, to some extent, re-producing these dominant terms (Hall 1996). As Hall (1996) notes, though these terms may be problematic to use, they are yet to be replaced. Participants were purposively chosen on the basis of their relevance to the research aims, rather than selected 'based on certain variables prior to the study' (Chenitz and Swanson 1986:9).

The term 'South Asian' was used rather than simply 'Asian', since in some contexts, Asian can include East Asian countries such as China and Japan (Rajiva 2013). Following other studies (Franceschelli and O'Brien 2015; Lindridge and Hogg 2006; Rajiva 2013), the term 'South Asian' includes participants of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan heritage. Despite efforts to recruit several participants from all of these ethnic backgrounds, no Bangladeshi women were recruited, and only one participant from Sri Lanka took part in the study.

Initially, the aim was to recruit a sample of around 10-15 second- or third-generation British South Asian expectant mothers and interview them prior to birth and several months after. This approach follows similar studies of mainly white, middle-class mothers, which captured rich datasets on motherhood, consumption and gender identity (Afflerback et al. 2014;

Lupton 2000; Miller 2007; Ogle et al. 2013). Second- and third-generation women were sought mainly to minimise any language barriers as interviews were carried out in English. The sample strove to include women from different ethnic backgrounds (such as Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) and from different religions (e.g. Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam). The aim was to examine ‘commonalities and differences’ in ways that ‘go beyond previous studies which tend to only consider women from particular religions...or ethnic groups’ (Bagguley and Hussain 2016:44).

Participants were recruited via personal contacts, snowball sampling, appeals using online mothering websites (including Mumsnet and Netmums), South Asian community and women’s groups (including the Muslim Women’s Network, British South Indians group, local Hindu forums, university BME networks, local places of worship), contacting South Asian women bloggers and other relevant websites/organisations. Several of these organisations/groups agreed to advertise the study, with online media (such as appeals on Facebook, twitter and posts on websites). A personal contact within a local faith school for Muslim girls also agreed to circulate details of the study to any interested staff and parents, with permission of the head-teacher and chair of governors. The researcher also met with members of two Public Health teams in Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire to discuss the research aims and suggest any other potential community groups.

Despite efforts to recruit a more diverse sample, the recruitment process yielded mostly second-generation Muslim participants of Indian or Pakistani heritage (a profile of participants is outlined in section 3.5; see Table 3.2; Appendix D). Snowball sampling was also used, which is typical in interpretive research on motherhood, ethnicity and consumption (Afflerback et al. 2014; Lupton 2000; Miller 2007; Lindridge et al. 2004; Sekhon and Szmigin 2011). Each participant was asked to recommend up to three potential

participants, to avoid over-recruiting from a particular local or familial group (Hays 1996). However in most cases no more than two contacts were recommended by participants, and follow-ups did not always lead to recruitment.

After extensive participant recruitment endeavours, it became apparent that recruiting a sample of expectant women would not be possible within the time frame of the data collection stage. During the recruitment and data collection phase, sampling criteria were then extended to include women who were either expectant or had children of primary school age, as well as including first-generation women who were proficient and comfortable to hold interviews in English. Section 3.4.1 outlines the data collection phase of the research journey. An overview of the research participants is provided in section 3.5 (see Table 3.2; Appendix D). Section 3.6 offers methodological reflections on the research sample and process.

### **3.3.4 Research ethics**

A research protocol for this study has been granted ethical approval by The Open University's Research Ethics Committee for research with human participants. Given that the participants were ethnic minority women, some of whom were expectant mothers, the study was scrutinised with a full review by the committee. Participants were informed verbally and/or by a leaflet, using clear, plain language, about the research study and what participation entailed (Appendix A provides a copy of the leaflet). They were aware that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time during the research process. Participants understood that interviews were an informal discussion of their experiences, more like a 'conversation' than a formal interview (Belk et al. 2013:35), and they could share as much or as little as they chose.

Participants' identities have been anonymised in line with Data Protection Act 1998 codes of practice: individuals' names and precise details (e.g. place names) have not been disclosed, and data was stored securely. Their confidentiality is also protected through the use of pseudonyms. Consent to participate was gained from all participants via signed a written consent form (see Appendix B), or by verbal agreement, where interviews took place via telephone or Skype. Permission was sought to digitally record the interviews. Where subsequent interviews took place, verbal consent was obtained. Participants were made aware in advance that their consent would be sought when arranging interviews, in order to give women sufficient time to think about whether they wish to participate. All participants were given contact details for further information or notifying if they wished to (dis-)continue with the study.

Interviews were conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society's code of conduct. Every care was taken to minimise any psychological or physical harm. Participants were also given appropriate contact details for third party advice/concerns. Clear boundaries were established so that the participant was able to decide what she wished to disclose or not. At all times the researcher endeavoured to treat the participants with dignity and respect. Participants were aware that they could pause, postpone or stop the interview at any time and without explanation. They were also given the option to receive a summarised copy of the findings of the research, which all women were interested to receive. Section 3.4.1 offers a more detailed discussion of the data collection and interviewing process.

Offering vouchers to participants is increasingly common in interpretive consumer research (c.f. AbiGhanham and Atkinson 2016; Banister et al. 2016; Fournier 1998; Hamilton and Catterall 2006). As a gesture of appreciation, a voucher of £20 was offered following their participation in the study. Participants had usually given several hours of their time, often



juggling many responsibilities and busy family schedules, so this gesture seemed appropriate.

### **3.4 The research journey**

This section discusses the research journey undertaken by the researcher, from gathering the data through to data analysis. The research process is described in order to offer transparency, providing an insight into how the data collection and analysis transpired.

#### **3.4.1 Collecting the data**

As outlined in section 3.3.2, data were collected through in-depth phenomenological interviews. An initial pilot interview was carried out in April 2014, with a participant who was recruited via a personal contact. The pilot interview helped to ensure that participants would respond to the research questions and to confirm that the time-frame of one to two hours was sufficient. The pilot interview was successful in generating considerable and insightful data, and helped to further refine the interview protocol, which is provided in Appendix C.

Participant recruitment began in July 2014, while the main data collection period was from August 2014 to November 2015. Participants were recruited from a variety of different geographical areas in the UK, but mainly focussed on the north west of England. The process of participant recruitment was longer and somewhat more difficult than had been anticipated at the outset of the study. However, the researcher was able to approach the research design with sufficient flexibility, which meant that the sample criteria could be expanded without compromising the aims of the study.

At the start of the recruitment process, the aim was to recruit around 10-15 second-generation women of South Asian heritage living in the UK, who were first-time, expectant mothers.

Following other studies of motherhood and gender identity (c.f. Afflerback et al. 2014; Banister et al. 2016; Budds et al. 2017; Miller 2007; Thomson et al. 2010), the women would have been interviewed in the late stages of pregnancy and then once or twice in the months following birth.

However, after several months of significant participant recruitment efforts, it became clear that the sample frame would need to be broadened, whilst retaining the focus on motherhood, gender identity and consumption. Potential participants from personal contacts and appeals were gradually coming forward, however they usually had one or more children under five years old (as opposed to being pregnant with their first child). Therefore, the sampling criteria were broadened to include women who were either expectant or had children of primary school age. Following several referrals and enquiries via personal contacts, the decision was also taken to include a small number of first-generation women who were proficient and comfortable to hold interviews in English.

Participant recruitment was extended beyond the initial number of 10-15 participants. Since participants were mostly recruited after they had become mothers, women were usually interviewed once in a longer interview, rather than before and after giving birth. In total, 23 participants were interviewed for this study, with interviews continuing until the researcher was confident that data saturation had been reached. Section 3.5 offers a profile of the participants (see also Appendix D for participant synopses). Interviews ranged from 55 minutes to 3 hours, with most lasting around 1.5 to 2 hours.

A small number of women (8) were interviewed twice. The main reason for the second interviews was that some of these women had only very recently had their first child, or were expecting a child at the time of the first interview. Some women had agreed to a further interview once they had more experience of motherhood, or had given birth to their next

baby. Some second interviews were also carried out with participants recruited at the start of data collection, which gave the researcher the opportunity to follow-up any further questions that had emerged later in the data collection process. Early stages of data analysis had also commenced shortly after data collection had begun (Olagun and Fatoki 2009). Interviews continued until no new themes were emerging from the data and the researcher was satisfied that saturation had been reached.

Wherever possible, face-to-face interviews were carried out in the participants' preferred location (usually their home, but sometimes at a café or at their workplace). Some interviews were carried out by telephone, Facetime or Skype. The researcher took a pragmatic approach to remote interviewing, in response to participants' preferences (e.g. the necessities of busy family schedules), as well as the practicalities of travelling to more distant locations (King and Horrocks 2010).

Throughout the data collection phase, interviews were often rescheduled or cancelled, reflecting the busy and unpredictable nature of family life. The home environment, commonly used in consumer research (c.f. Epp and Price 2008; Fournier 1998; Holt and Thompson 2004; Thompson and Üstüner 2015), was usually the participants' choice of venue. Often, participants had their babies and/or young children with them, or had left them in another room, napping or with family relatives. Consequently, these interviews were punctuated with participants' parenting responsibilities, such as the need to feed a child, change nappies and put babies to sleep. Occasionally, husbands and other family members also popped in and out of the room. The researcher used her discretion and was guided by the participants to decide if and how they wanted her to be introduced.

It was not unusual for husbands/family members to take the baby/child out of the room if necessary. As the researcher is also a mother of two children, she was able to carefully draw

on her experiences of interacting with children, to develop a rapport and trust with participants (Johnson 2001). Participants often encouraged their young children to talk to the researcher, or occasionally left the researcher holding or ‘minding’ the baby while they prepared a bottle/food etc., indicating that trust with the researcher had been established. These momentary pauses sometimes gave the researcher an opportunity to subtly reflect and identify areas that had been discussed or may require further probing.

The interviews began with an initial question asking participants: “Tell me a little about yourself”. Depending on participants’ answers, further ‘grand-tour’ questions (McCracken 1988) were asked, regarding participants’ family background, education and career. Given the exploratory, interpretive nature of the study, the researcher was keen to enable participants to offer their own account of their journey to motherhood. The participants therefore guided the direction of the early stages of the interview, with the researcher questioning to clarify comments or to probe further when necessary (King and Horrocks 2010; Ogle and Damhorst 2005).

In many cases, participants required little prompting and embarked on a detailed depiction of their life-story to becoming a mother. As data collection progressed, it became apparent that throughout the interviews, participants were drawing on their upbringing and experiences of education and marriage to make sense of their experiences of motherhood. The extent to which participants would reflect on these experiences had not been anticipated prior to data collection. These exploratory discussions helped to further refine the interview protocol for subsequent interviews, and enabled the researcher to pursue unexpected and ‘fruitful’ themes that were emerging during the data collection (Belk et al. 2013:40).

Typically, interview questions funnelled from general to specific questions (Belk et al. 2013). Following grand tour questions and participant-led discussions of their journey to

becoming a mother, participants were asked to talk about several broad areas relating to motherhood. These broad areas included: experiences of pregnancy and preparing for motherhood/birth, early experiences of motherhood, returning to work and everyday mothering practices. Within these broad areas, there was no set list of questions, but prompts were used as necessary. Furthermore, the broad areas were not absolute, and the researcher formulated questions in response to participants' experiences and reflections, encouraging them to share deeper descriptions (Thompson and Haytko 1997). However, the researcher also circled back to earlier relevant topics for 'greater depth' in the discussion (Belk et al. 2013:39; Appendix C provides the interview protocol).

In some cases, participants began to talk, of their own accord, about topics that brought about heightened emotions. For example, participants often reflected on their own or their mothers' experiences, such as being pressured into marriage, or their struggles to attend university. In the early stages of the interview, a small number of women (3) voluntarily disclosed that they had experienced domestic abuse. These participants were aware that their wellbeing was paramount and they could disclose as little or as much as they preferred, and could pause or end the interview at any time. All participants were offered the opportunity to receive details of third party support organisations. This was reiterated several times during and after any interviews in which participants had discussed instances of abuse or other distressing topics. In these cases, the women reported that they were comfortable to discuss these matters in their own way, indicating that they trusted the researcher. No participants requested further information/support.

### **3.4.2 Analysing the data**

The data collection generated over 43 hours of interview data. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were rechecked for accuracy (Smith

et al. 2009). During the data collection phase, the researcher also kept a diary of reflections and notes following interviews.

In the original research design, in which 10-15 participants were to be interviewed over two stages, the plan was to analyse the data using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). However, a major tenet of IPA analysis involves an idiographic approach, in order to provide a rich, detailed description of individual experience. Such descriptions are generated on a case by case basis, where each individual case is written up, before moving on to the next (Smith et al. 2013). Following the examination of each case, the next stage involves looking for patterns across cases (Smith et al. 2013:101). Thus, IPA is suited to studies that draw on smaller samples of around 3-6 participants, or even a single case (Smith et al. 2013).

In light of the changes to the research design and sampling (see section 3.4.1), this study had generated a large amount of rich data from 23 different participants. Conducting a detailed, case by case approach before looking for common themes would not have been possible within the time frame of doctoral study. Therefore, this study did not follow IPA as the main method of data analysis. Instead, thematic analysis was used as a tool to interpret the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). Yet the theoretical foundations that underpinned this thematic analysis lie within the existential-phenomenology paradigm, on which IPA is also based.

### **3.4.2.1 Thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis is ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data...and describes your data (set) in (rich) detail’ (Braun and Clarke 2006:79). Although many different approaches to data analysis use some form of thematic analysis, including IPA, Braun and Clarke (2006) have developed thematic analysis into a specific approach in its own right. When using thematic analysis, however, the researcher must be

clear about the theoretical positioning that drives the analysis. Thematic analysis is compatible with a range of perspectives, including interpretive epistemologies (Braun and Clarke 2006). The thematic analysis used in this thesis is based on the interpretivist, existential-phenomenological paradigm (as discussed in section 3.2). This theoretical positioning has shaped several of the choices that must be made when conducting a thematic analysis, and these are outlined below.

The researcher must consider what counts as a theme. In this thesis, a theme ‘captures something important about the data’ in relation to the research aims and represents ‘some level of patterned response or meaning within the dataset’ (Braun and Clarke 2006:78). While a theme is ideally identifiable in several instances across the dataset, ‘more instances do not necessarily mean the theme itself is more crucial’ (Braun and Clarke 2006:78). A theme is not only something that is given ‘considerable attention’ in many data items, as it may only appear in ‘relatively little of the data set’ (Braun and Clarke 2006:78). In this study, themes were considered as ‘key’, not based on ‘quantifiable measures’, but on whether it ‘captures something important in relation to the research question’ (Braun and Clarke 2006:78).

The process of identifying patterns or themes in the data should also be decided at the outset of thematic analysis. Themes can be identified using two different approaches: an inductive, ‘bottom-up’ approach, or a theoretical, ‘top-down’ approach (Braun and Clarke 2006:83). In line with the study’s research paradigm and exploratory aims, an inductive approach was taken in this study. Whilst recognising that the researcher cannot fully bracket themselves/their knowledge from the analysis process, the themes were not initially driven by theoretical interests. Themes were data-driven and data was not coded to fit a pre-determined coding frame (Braun and Clarke 2006). This inductive approach also fits with

the data collection method of in-depth phenomenological interviews, which involved purposeful bracketing (see section 3.4.1). However, as themes were developed, literature was used to refine codes and themes, which sensitised the researcher to ‘more subtle features of the data’ (Braun and Clark 2006:86; Tuckett 2005).

It is also important to clarify the ‘level’ at which themes are identified (Braun and Clarke 2006:84). The themes were developed in an iterative way, alongside the process of refining the codes (discussed in section 3.4.2.2). As coding moved from an emic level (i.e. participants’ perspective) to an etic level (i.e. linking to more global themes, c.f. Thompson 1996), themes were often derived from participants’ own words, which were interpreted in relation to concepts from relevant literature. Themes were therefore developed using a ‘continuous part-to-whole’ and ‘whole-to-part’ movement, both within the data and between data and existing literature (Thompson et al. 1994:435).

#### **3.4.2.2 The thematic analysis process**

Braun and Clark (2006) propose six phases in the process of conducting thematic analysis, which were followed in this study. The phases range from familiarising oneself with the data to reporting the meaning and content of themes. However, the analysis process is not a linear progression from one to the next (Braun and Clark 2006). Instead, the process is recursive, with movement is back and forth as necessary (ibid.). Table 3.1 summarises the phases of thematic analysis that were followed in this study (adapted from Braun and Clarke 2006:87).



**Table 3.1 Phases of the Thematic Analysis**

Phase	Description of the process	Example
<b>1. Familiarising yourself with your data</b>	Transcribing data, reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas.	The transcripts were read several times. Ideas, patterns and potential areas of interest were highlighted/noted.
<b>2. Generating initial codes</b>	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.	<p>Example coded data extract:</p> <p><i>She's 19 months old now. It was a bit of a shock to me when she came along because I'd only just managed to secure a position in [organisation] and I thought, right that's it I'll go with this for a year see where it gets me, blah, blah, blah and then I think about four months in to my finding out that I'd actually got the position and I was setting up for this I'd fallen pregnant. So then obviously that had taken a bit of a snap to my career so that's, kind of, been put on pause now as well for a little bit because obviously she takes up everything now</i> (Nabeela)</p> <p>Codes:</p> <p>Becoming pregnant quickly and/or unexpectedly</p> <p>Motherhood as threat to/loss of independence</p> <p>Labour and resource intensive</p>
<b>3. Searching for themes</b>	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data to each potential theme.	<p>Example theme: Consuming appropriately during the transition to motherhood</p> <p>Example of coded data extracts for this theme:</p> <p><i>...in India when you get pregnant, everybody comes in and gives you some advice. Do this, do that, do this, do that, and even when it's contradictory advice, you have to... I used to get mad at the fact that I was getting contradictory advice.</i> (Parminder)</p> <p>Codes:</p> <p>Competing/conflicting advice</p>

Phase	Description of the process	Example
		<p><i>...it's quite a matriarchal culture, with the whole... you know, you have to go stay with them, they tell you what to eat, how to do everything, so they want to be there when it's actually happening, and so you don't have a thing of privacy, so I had to really insist that I don't want either of them there.</i> (Anita)</p> <p>High status advice from female family members</p> <p>Participant's position within the family hierarchy</p>
<b>4. Reviewing themes</b>	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2); generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.	<p>Themes were refined by examining coded data, by theme and across the dataset. A thematic map was developed, in which themes were organised into two findings chapters:</p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> findings chapter (Chapter 4): Participants' journeys to motherhood</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> findings chapter (Chapter 5): Incorporating motherhood into gender identity</p> <p>Example of theme and subthemes:</p> <p>Findings chapter 1: Theme 1: Gender socialisation within family hierarchies</p> <p>Subthemes: Parents' gender roles and domestic division of labour; gendered sibling hierarchies; parents' changing views of gender norms</p>
<b>5. Defining and naming themes</b>	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.	<p>Themes were further refined to reflect the story of both the theme and overall analysis.</p> <p>Themes were reviewed and named to help explain what the theme was about. Excerpts from data were used to help name themes where appropriate.</p> <p>Theme: Socialising children with the 'best of both worlds': motherhood as an opportunity for change</p> <p>Defining the theme: Captures how participants viewed motherhood as an opportunity to choose what/how they transmit elements of their cultural and religious heritage to their children.</p>

Phase	Description of the process	Example
<b>6. Producing the report</b>	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.	Findings chapters were written up, using the thematic map and illustrative extracts from the data.

### ***Phase one***

Phase one commenced during data collection, which is not unusual when conducting thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). The interviews were transcribed verbatim, using a transcription company approved by the university. Each transcript was checked against the audio recording to ensure the quality of the transcription (King and Horrocks 2011). Transcripts were also anonymised, with participants given pseudonyms. Transcripts were read several times, alongside the recording in the first instance. The familiarisation process also involved taking notes, searching for patterns of meaning and highlighting areas of potential interest in the data.

### ***Phases two and three***

After becoming familiar with the data, the process of generating initial codes began. At first, coding began manually. A code can be applied to a word, short phrase or a chunk of text (Belk et al. 2013; Saldana 2008). As the study is exploratory in nature, the coding process was not specifically geared towards particular features or topics within the data. Therefore the process of coding was extensive and became somewhat cumbersome. In order to manage the data and coding process more effectively, NVivo 10 was used. NVivo is a software package designed specifically for organising and managing qualitative data. The main benefits were that data could be selected and easily coded to any relevant codes. The package also enabled codes to be re-organised (e.g. expanded, merged or collapsed) or re-named quickly and easily. Locating data excerpts and searching the dataset was also much easier, especially given the relatively large number of long transcripts. The ability to navigate between codes and coded transcripts was particularly helpful during the iterative coding process.

Since the interpretation of data is related to ‘lived experiences’, interpretation was ongoing, alongside data collection (Thompson et al. 1989). The interpretive process therefore followed the hermeneutic process of constant re-evaluation and modification (Carrigan and Szmigin 2006; Thompson 1991). Once data collection had ended, the researcher had iteratively developed codes (see Appendix E for a list of codes) and began to search for themes across the data set. The interpretation process involved moving between phases two and three as coding progressed and gathered around emerging themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). Codes and themes were ‘challenged and modified with each iterative turn’ (Thompson and Üstüner 2015:243). The hermeneutic process of interpretation also involved circling back and forth between relevant literatures (Thompson et al. 1989). This iterative process is a common feature of analysis in existential phenomenology, and is referred to as the ‘hermeneutic circle’ (Hirschman 1986:242). As part of this stage of interpreting the data, the researcher drew on consumer research (c.f. Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Thompson and Üstüner 2015) and sociological literature on gender identity and gender norms (c.f. Butler 1990; McLeod 2005; McNay 1999a). Such literature often draws on Butler’s theory of performativity (Butler 1990) and/or Bourdieu’s (c.f. Bourdieu 1984; 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) theories of habitus, capital and field and reflexivity (c.f. Adams 2006; Adkins 2003; McNay 1999a). Through moving from emic to etic<sup>10</sup> analysis, such literature helped the researcher to ‘contextualise participants’ narratives in a broader sociocultural context’ (Fischer et al. 2007; Thompson and Hirschman 1995; Thompson and Üstüner 2015:243). The theoretical framework used in this thesis to interpret the data was

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<sup>10</sup> Emic coding and analysis draws directly on the language and experiences of the people being studied and emphasises the insider’s perspective, while etic coding and analysis means that the researcher draws on language and concepts to make sense of the emic analysis in ways ‘that seem appropriate to us within our scholarly field of interest’ (Belk et al. 2013:141).

developed during this phase of data analysis, and was refined through the subsequent phases. Since the research is exploratory in nature, the framework was not planned or anticipated prior to data collection.

### ***Phase four***

Phase four began when themes were developed into ‘candidate themes and subthemes’, and involved refining the themes (Braun and Clarke 2006:90). Thematic maps were developed (with post-it notes etc.) to capture how themes and codes were linked. During this process, themes and subthemes were examined to ensure that the coded data supported the themes. Some themes were rearranged, some were developed further, while some sub-themes were collapsed into one another. Themes were reviewed for their internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton 1990). The researcher checked that the data within the themes ‘cohered together meaningfully’, whilst ensuring that there were ‘clear and identifiable distinctions between themes’ (Braun and Clarke 2006:91).

Themes were reviewed both within the coded data gathered around each theme, but also across the data set, by re-reading the data. Re-reading helped to code any additional data that were missed earlier in the interpretation process (ibid.). At the end of phase four, the researcher had a ‘fairly good idea’ as to the different themes, how they fitted together and the overall story they told about the data (Braun and Clarke 2006:92).

### ***Phase five***

Themes were then further refined through the process of naming and defining the themes. This process involved identifying what the ‘essence of what the theme is about’ (Braun and Clarke 2006:92). Within each theme, the data were organised to give a coherent account the story that theme tells. Sometimes a phrase used by one or several participants captured a key

part in the story, and were used as part of the titles of subthemes (e.g. ‘finding a balance’, or ‘a spanner in the works’). Although theme and subtheme titles and narratives were developed at this stage, they remained open to refinement until the end of phase six.

### ***Phase six***

Phase six, the final phase, involved producing the report. In this thesis, the findings were written-up into two findings chapters (Chapters 4 and 5). Writing up a thematic analysis involves telling ‘a complicated story’ of the data in a way which ‘convinces the reader of the merit and validity’ of the analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006:93). The researcher sought to use data extracts both to demonstrate the prevalence of the theme and provide ‘vivid examples’ to capture the points of the story (ibid.). The findings chapters aim to equip the reader with a ‘concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell’ within and across the themes (ibid.). A brief introduction to the presentation of the findings chapters is given in the concluding remarks to this chapter (section 3.7). Section 3.5 provides a profile of the research participants.

## **3.5 Profile of research participants**

This section introduces the participants in this study. In section 3.5.1 a brief overview of the sample is given, outlining how certain terms such as ethnicity and class are used to describe the participants. The section provides a table of participants with key demographic and other relevant information. Appendix D offers a brief synopsis of each of the participants, an example of which is provided below:

<b>Participant (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Synopsis</b>
<i>Jasvinder</i>	Jasvinder is a second-generation mother of Indian origin; she was raised as Sikh but is now practising Hinduism. She lives has one child (aged 4 months) and they with her husband, who is also Hindu. Her parents live in close proximity; Jasvinder had moved away to study and work but has since moved to be nearer to her parents. Jasvinder is in her early thirties and is educated to post-graduate level. She is not currently working but plans to continue to develop her career in the near future.

### 3.5.1 Overview of participants

In describing participants' ethnic origin, generation and religion, the researcher recognised that these categories are socially constructed and contested terms (Hall 1996), and that they intersect in complex ways (Crenshaw 1991; Hill-Collins 1998; Yuval-Davis 2006). The participants' profiles are guided by their own self-identifications and discussions of their family's migration. In most cases, participants' self-identifications in terms of generation corresponded with commonly used definitions (Portes and Zhou 1993). Participants who came to the UK as adults usually identified as first-generation, while participants who were born in the UK or grew up in the UK typically identified as second generation<sup>11</sup> (Nadim 2015; Portes and Zhou 1993).

The majority of participants are second-generation Muslim women of Indian or Pakistani heritage. Of the second- and third-generation women, two women describe themselves as Hindu (Chanda and Jasvinder), while one is Sikh (Raveena). Jasvinder was also raised as a Sikh, but now also practices Hinduism. There are four first-generation participants. Safiya

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<sup>11</sup> Two participants (Raveena and Ashira) identified as third-generation. Although their description of their parents' migration history suggested some may regard them as second-generation, the researcher deemed participants' self-definitions as paramount, and therefore used participants' own preferred identifications.



and Asma are both Muslim and from Pakistan. Parminder is from India and is Hindu. Hashini is Sri Lankan and did not disclose her religion.

Most participants are educated to at least graduate level, including all of the first-generation participants. Five (Muslim) women did not continue their education beyond secondary or further-education level: Zahara, Naeema, Marjana, Mahira and Fareeda. Section 4.3 examines participants' negotiations surrounding higher education in more detail.

The vast majority of second- and third- generation participants were raised in working-class families, while the first-generation participants were raised in middle-class households. This understanding of participants' social class was based on participants' accounts of their parents' employment and education level (Lareau 1987; Thapar-Bjorket and Sanghera 2010). However, it is also recognised that ethnicity and class are difficult to disentangle and intersect differently for ethnic minorities (Crenshaw 1991; Crozier and Davies 2006). Participants' social class background is used in this study to consider participants' gender socialisation (section 4.2). Participants' ability to mobilise different types of capital (Bourdieu 1997; see section 2.5) is a key part of participants' negotiations of their gender identity (see Chapter 6).

The majority of participants' mothers were involved in some form of manual paid work. Almost all of these participants were second- or third-generation. Their parents had usually come to the UK as young adults and mostly worked in low-skilled, manual jobs such as working in factories and mills. Several participants' mothers were not able to work outside the home, due to family and childcare responsibilities, but took on piecemeal paid work, linked to factories, within the home. Section 4.2 examines the role of participants' upbringing, including the domestic division of labour, in their gender socialisation. Section 5.3 examines how participants were reflecting on their, and their mothers', experiences as

they balanced work and motherhood. Section 3.6.2 offers methodological reflections on the research sample.

**Table 3.2 Overview of Participants**

Pseudonym	Age	Education level	Employment (Full-time – FT /Part-time - PT)	Country of origin/ generation	Religion	No. Children (age)	Gender of children	Husband's Ethnic origin / generation/ religion	Raised in joint family home	Participant's mother worked	Lives/lived in joint family home (in-laws)	Participant's family in close proximity	Delayed having children
Jasvinder	30s	Post-graduate	Professional/ Maternity leave	India, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Hindu/ Sikh	1 (4 months)	F	Indian, 1 <sup>st</sup> , Hindu	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Zahara	20s	Further Education	Service worker (PT)	India, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Muslim	2 (9 months, pregnant)	Mix	Indian, 2 <sup>nd</sup> , Muslim	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Raveena	20s	Post-graduate	Professional/ Maternity leave	India, 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Sikh	1 (2 months)	M	Indian, 3 <sup>rd</sup> , Sikh	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Chanda	30s	Graduate	Professional (FT)	India/ Uganda 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Hindu	1 (2yrs, pregnant)	Mix	Indian, 1 <sup>st</sup> , Hindu	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Nabeela	30s	Graduate	Professional (PT)	India, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Muslim	1 (19 months)	F	Indian, 2 <sup>nd</sup> , Muslim	Yes	Yes	Yes/ now moved out	Yes	No
Parminder	30s	Post-graduate	Studying (FT)	India, 1 <sup>st</sup>	Hindu	1 (4yrs)	F	Indian, 1 <sup>st</sup> , Christian	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

<b>Delayed having children</b>	<b>Participant's family in close proximity</b>	<b>Lives/lived in joint family home (in-laws)</b>	<b>Participant's mother worked</b>	<b>Raised in joint family home</b>	<b>Husband's Ethnic origin/ generation/ religion</b>	<b>Gender of children</b>	<b>No. Children (age)</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Country +of origin/ generation</b>	<b>Employment (Full-time – FT /Part-time – PT)</b>	<b>Education level</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>
No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Indian, 2 <sup>nd</sup> , Muslim	F	1 (18 months)	Muslim	Pakistan, 2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup>	Professional (FT)	Post-graduate	30s	Anita
No	No	Yes until moving to UK	No	Not given	Pakistani, 1 <sup>st</sup> , Muslim	Mix	2 (2yrs, 10 months)	Muslim	Pakistan, 1 <sup>st</sup>	Stay at home mother	Graduate	30s	Safiya
N/A	Yes	No	No	No	Pakistani, Muslim	M	1 (3 months)	Muslim	India/ E. Africa, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Stay at home mother	Graduate	30s	Madina
No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Indian, 1 <sup>st</sup> , Muslim	M	2 (2x 18 months)	Muslim	India, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Graduate (PT)	Graduate	20s	Rafeeqa
No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Indian, 2 <sup>nd</sup> , Muslim	Mix	2 (2yrs, 5 months)	Muslim	India, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Stay at home mother	Graduate	30s	Shaheera
Yes	Until moving to UK	No	No	No	Sri Lankan, 1 <sup>st</sup> , not given	N/A	1 (5 months pregnant)	Not given	Sri Lanka, 1 <sup>st</sup>	Professional (FT)	Post-graduate	20s	Hashini

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education level</b>	<b>Employment (Full-time –FT /Part-time - PT)</b>	<b>Country of origin/ generation</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>No. Children (age)</b>	<b>Gender of children</b>	<b>Husband's Ethnic origin / generation/ religion</b>	<b>Raised in joint family home</b>	<b>Participant's mother worked</b>	<b>Lives/lived in joint family home (in-laws)</b>	<b>Participant's family in close proximity</b>	<b>Delayed having children</b>
Mahira	30s	Secondary	Unemployed/ Maternity	Pakistan, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Muslim	2 (11yrs, pregnant)	Mix	Pakistani, 1 <sup>st</sup> , Muslim	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Namra	40s	Further Education	Administration (PT)	India, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Muslim	3 (12yrs, 9yrs, 4yrs)	Mix	Indian, 2 <sup>nd</sup> , Muslim	No	Yes	Yes /now moved out	No (but in-laws local)	No
Ashira	30s	Post- graduate	Professional (FT)	Pakistan, 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Muslim	1 (3yrs)	F	Pakistani, 1 <sup>st</sup> , Muslim	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Marjana	30s	Further Education	Unskilled work in small business (PT)	Pakistan, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Muslim	4 (11yrs, 4yrs, 2yrs, 2 months)	Mix	Pakistani, 1 <sup>st</sup> , Muslim	No	No	No	Yes	No
Ameena	30s	Graduate	Graduate (FT )	Indian, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Muslim	4 (2 x 9yrs, 5yrs, 18 months)	Mix	Indian, 1 <sup>st</sup> , Muslim	Yes	Yes	Yes/no w moved out	Yes	No

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education level</b>	<b>Employment (Full-time –FT /Part-time - PT)</b>	<b>Country of origin/ generation</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>No. Children (age)</b>	<b>Gender of children</b>	<b>Husband's Ethnic origin / generation/ religion</b>	<b>Raised in joint family home</b>	<b>Participant's mother worked</b>	<b>Lives/lived in joint family home (in-laws)</b>	<b>Participant's family in close proximity</b>	<b>Delayed having children</b>
Naeema	30s	Graduate	Graduate (PT)	Pakistan, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Muslim	1 (7yrs)	F	Pakistani, 1 <sup>st</sup> , Muslim	No	No	Yes (her parents) / now moved out	Yes	No
Jameela	30s	Post-graduate	Professional (FT)	India, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Muslim	2 (7yrs, 2yrs)	M	Indian, 1 <sup>st</sup> , Muslim	No	No	No	Yes	No
Fatima	30s	Graduate	Graduate (FT)	Pakistan, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Muslim	2 (10yrs, 1yr)	Mix	Pakistani, 2 <sup>nd</sup> , Muslim	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Asma	20s	Graduate	Studying (PT)	Pakistan, 1 <sup>st</sup>	Muslim	2 (4yrs, 17 months)	Mix	Pakistani, 1 <sup>st</sup> , Muslim	Not given	No	Until moving to UK	No	No
Fareeda	40s	Secondary	Administration (PT)	Indian, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Muslim	3 (15yrs, 10yrs, 1yr)	Mix	Indian, 2 <sup>nd</sup> , Muslim	No	Yes	Yes/ now moved out	Yes	No
Samia	30s	Graduate	Graduate (FT)	Pakistan, 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Muslim	2 (12 yrs, pregnant)	M, ?	Pakistani, Muslim	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

## **3.6 Methodological Reflections**

This section offers methodological reflections on the research process. Section 3.6.1 reflects on the position of the researcher in the research. Section 3.6.2 reflects on how the composition of the research sample is likely to have shaped the findings of this research. Section 3.6.3 evaluates the quality of the research process undertaken.

### **3.6.1 Reflexivity and the position of the researcher**

Recognising and reflecting on the position of the researcher is an important part of conducting qualitative, interpretive research (Hogg and Maclaran 2008), particularly when researching marginalised groups, such as South Asian women (Bhopal 2010). Since the researcher acts a tool of interpretation (see section 3.2.4), the researcher plays a powerful role in both the research design and the interpretation of the data. As section 3.3.2 discussed, this research sought to ensure a balance in the relationship between the researcher and the researched (i.e. the participants), by placing primacy on participants' lived experiences. Using in-depth phenomenological interviews, underpinned by a social constructionist worldview, helped to position participants as experts on their own lives.

Throughout the research journey, the researcher recognised how she, as a woman, had experienced becoming a mother, as had the women in this study. Yet she occupies a position as an outsider (as white, British and middle-class). As noted in section 3.4.1, the researcher often found that from the early stages of interviews, participants were offering detailed accounts of their upbringing. On reflection, it seemed that most participants regarded the researcher as occupying a neutral position as a naïve outsider. Although it is recognised that some participants may have been wary of how they presented themselves to a non-South Asian researcher, participants tended to assume that the researcher knew very little about their culture, religion, family structure, and suchlike (Ryan et al. 2011). While a South Asian

heritage researcher would likely have a more in-depth knowledge and awareness of some issues, he/she would be associated with a particular ethnic background, religion and language, which may affect the research process. As a woman and a mother, the researcher and participants shared sufficient common ground for participants to reflect on their lived experiences, perhaps more freely than if the researcher were a member of a South Asian community.

Being able to empathise with participants about becoming a mother helped to establish trust with participants, who sometimes asked about the researcher's own experiences of motherhood, especially relating to pregnancy, birth and early motherhood. Whilst being wary of introducing bias, or asserting her own position in relation to the norms of good mothering, the researcher carefully shared her experiences where necessary. Doing so helped to establish rapport and develop a shared understanding, which enabled participants to reflect further on their own experiences. Furthermore, the researcher's feelings of being somewhat of an outsider were not static, and diminished somewhat as the research journey progressed. The researcher gradually became more confident in understanding some of the different cultural and religious norms that shaped participants' experiences. Yet, throughout the research process, the researcher's position encouraged her to be critically reflexive, through critical self-examination (Hogg and Maclaran 2008), and place primacy on participants' accounts of their lived experiences.

### **3.6.2 Reflections on the research sample**

As discussed earlier in the chapter (sections 3.3.3; 3.4.1), the research sample largely comprised second-generation Muslim women, and most participants (including all non-Muslim women) were graduates. It is recognised that the findings of this study are shaped by the composition of the sample. For example, many women in this study are second-



generation participants, most of whom were university educated, and may have similar levels of acculturation. These women are likely to share similar experiences in negotiating their identities between two cultures (Lindridge et al. 2004). In contrast, the thesis has not captured the experiences of any first-generation South Asian women who were not university educated. It is recognised that the sampling criteria relating to the ability to speak comfortably in English may have shaped the findings of this study.

Furthermore, participants who have previously negotiated gender norms may have felt more comfortable and confident to share their experiences of becoming a mother. Given the popular stereotypes of young South Asian Muslim women in the UK, as docile and destined to become housewives (Ramji 2007), those who were keen and confident to discuss their negotiations of their gender identity with a non-Asian female researcher may have wanted their voices to be heard.

Indeed, it appears that an inadvertent consequence of the challenges in recruiting participants (discussed in section 3.3.3) was that South Asian women who had negotiated their identities as independent women, albeit to different extents and in different ways, were more likely to come forward. The notion of becoming an independent woman (or women) emerged from the data analysis and captures the way in which most participants viewed themselves as becoming financially independent (i.e. by working/pursuing their career) and exerting choice in terms of whom they married. Being financially independent was important because it meant that participants could provide for themselves independently from their husbands, should they need to. For the majority of participants, a key way to improve their ability to become independent was to become university-educated, which opened up opportunities to negotiate and/or delay marriage, as other studies have found (Ahmad 2011; Bagguley and Hussain 2016). However, for a small number of participants, usually those whose parents

did not allow/encourage them to attend university, becoming independent meant securing a (non-graduate) job and continuing to work/study after they were married. For three participants, who were given little or no choice in whom they married, and who experienced forms of domestic abuse, becoming independent also involved becoming divorced, exerting choice in their subsequent marriage and returning to their work/study goals.

While the composition of the research sample was not anticipated prior to participant recruitment or data collection, as data collection progressed, the researcher became aware that participants typically reflected on their upbringing and journeys to motherhood (as discussed in section 3.4.1). During the data analysis process, participants' reflections were analysed and used to help structure the findings chapters. Chapter 4 captures how participants negotiated their identities as independent women as part of their journeys to motherhood, while Chapter 5 examines how participants reflected on this process as they incorporated motherhood into their gender identities.

Albeit unintentionally, the achieved sample has enabled this thesis to extend existing research (Bhopal 1998; Lindridge et al. 2004) that examines South Asian mothers. In doing so, the research does not claim to be representative of the wider population of South Asian women living in the UK. Indeed, it is acknowledged that a different, perhaps more diverse sample may contribute different findings, thereby extending the thesis' findings. Nevertheless, the research sample has generated a rich dataset that enabled the researcher to discern common meanings whilst examining the diversity within participants' lived experiences. The thesis contributes a nuanced understanding of the ways in which these women negotiate new gender identities through their consumption practices, on becoming a mother.

### **3.6.3 Evaluating the research**

This section evaluates the research using a framework that has been developed for qualitative, interpretive research (Golden-Biddle and Locke 1993; Hogg and Maclaran 2008). Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) constructed a framework to enable qualitative, interpretive researchers to convince readers of the soundness of their interpretation and contribution to knowledge. Their work is particularly important for interpretive researchers who are working in disciplines in which positivistic research paradigms remain prevalent, such as consumer research (Hogg and Maclaran 2008). While positivistic researchers evaluate their research using the concepts of validity, reliability and objectivity, interpretive researchers can convince the audience of the credibility of the accounts presented, by appealing to the authenticity, plausibility and criticality of the text (Belk 2007; Golden-Biddle and Locke 1993; Hogg and Maclaran 2008). This thesis draws on these three concepts to reflexively evaluate the study. The following sections (3.6.3.1-3) discuss how the research meets each of these parts of the framework, whilst recognising that they often overlap (Maclaran and Hogg 2008).

#### **3.6.3.1 Authenticity**

Authenticity is concerned with convincing the readers that the interpretation is drawn from the data (Maclaran and Hogg 2008). Interpretive researchers develop authorial authority by making appeals to the authenticity of the findings, which have emerged from having ‘been there’ and shared participants’ lived experiences (Golden-Biddle and Locke 1993:613). Authenticity is established by using the everyday words of the respondents, through reflecting on the position of the researcher and the researched, and by offering a transparent account of the data collection and analysis (ibid.).

In following the tenets of existential-phenomenology, this thesis, and in particular, this chapter, has sought to demonstrate authenticity within the research process. The findings and discussion chapters draw on participants' experiences through their own words (as outlined in section 3.3.2). This methodology chapter has endeavoured to offer a transparent account of how the data has been collected and analysed (see section 3.4), as well as outlining a reflexive account of the researcher's position (see section 3.6.1). In particular, the iterative approach to data analysis aimed to demonstrate how meaningful interpretations were formed, whilst remaining faithful to participants' lived experiences. In researching the experiences of participants within an unfamiliar field (i.e. the (British) South Asian context), the researcher could draw on her unfamiliarity to reflexively challenge her interpretations throughout the research process (Golden-Biddle and Locke 1993).

### **3.6.3.2 Plausibility**

Plausibility is concerned with accounting for as much of the data as possible, so that the reader can be convinced that the interpretations that emerge are credible. Readers should be able to reflect that the interpretation of the data makes sense, and that the study has something 'distinctive to offer' (Maclaran and Hogg 2008:138).

In this thesis, plausibility has been sought by highlighting gaps in the literature to which the research contributes, suggesting that the research can fill them with 'something new in an area of generally shared importance' (Golden-Biddle and Locke 1993:609). The literature review (Chapter 2) has outlined several ways in which existing research could be extended. The research constitutes 'something new' by examining how South Asian women negotiate their gender identities, through consumption practices, on becoming a mother. In foregrounding the negotiation of gender identity, rather than acculturation, the thesis offers

a plausible, but different means of examining South Asian women's mothering and consumption practices.

It is recognised that the thesis presents an account of the data that may highlight only some aspects of participants' lives, whilst possibly overlooking others. Yet this is a fundamental tenet of interpretive consumer research: 'all we can offer is **an** interpretation, not **the** interpretation (Shankar and Patterson 2001:491, original emphasis). Plausibility was sought by extensively using the data to provide rich descriptions to illustrate the interpretations presented (Shankar and Patterson 2001), with primacy placed on participants' own words and interpretations.

### **3.6.3.3 Criticality**

Criticality refers to the ability of the text to encourage the reader to reflect on the ideas and underlying assumptions that shape the readers' interpretations (Golden-Biddle and Locke 1993). Criticality is achieved when the reader re-examines their views, enabling them to imagine new possibilities (Maclaran and Hogg 2008).

This thesis seeks to encourage the reader to re-examine their views in several ways, most notably to question their assumptions regarding South Asian women's ability to negotiate new gender identities and challenge gender norms on becoming a mother. It does so by using a different theoretical lens (based on a performative approach) to understand these women's experiences and consumption practices than is typically used when studying ethnic minority consumers (i.e. consumer acculturation). The thesis offers criticality by encouraging the reader to put aside their prior assumptions of mothers as experiencing consumption-induced liminality (Voice Group 2010a), or of South Asian women as either 'docile' and destined to become housewives (Bagguley and Hussain 2016), or 'turning their backs' on their cultural

and religious heritage (Bhopal 1997). Indeed, the notion of purposefully laying one's assumptions aside fits closely with the existential-phenomenological tenets which underpin the research methodology and complement the exploratory nature of the study.

Overall, this section (3.6.3) has outlined how the thesis presents a carefully developed 'theorised storyline' (Maclaran and Hogg 2008:130) from participants' accounts of their experiences. The section has discussed how the criteria of authenticity, plausibility and criticality have shaped the emergence of these interpretations. In doing so, the section has endeavoured to establish the quality of this research.

### **3.7 Concluding remarks to this chapter**

This chapter has presented and justified the methodology that has guided this research. Section 3.2 and 3.3 covered the research paradigm and research methods. Section 3.4 offered an account of the research journey from data collection to data analysis, in order to provide transparency (Moisander and Valtonen 2006; Yin 2015). Section 3.5 provided a profile of the research participants, presenting relevant information which is discussed further in the findings chapters, while section 3.6 discussed methodological reflections and evaluations of the study.

The findings of this study are presented in the following two chapters (4 and 5). Chapter 4 focuses on participants' journeys to motherhood. Participants were reflecting on their upbringing (especially their gender socialisation), and negotiations surrounding higher education and marriage to make sense of becoming a mother. The aim of this chapter is to understand participants' trajectories (Erel 2010) to motherhood. On their journeys to motherhood, participants were negotiating their gender identities to become independent women, whilst situated within South Asian family hierarchies.

The second findings chapter (Chapter 5) then examines how participants negotiate new gender identities as they become mothers. The themes in Chapter 5 demonstrate how participants were reflecting on their journey to motherhood to make sense of their experiences. Throughout Chapter 5, consumption is presented as a key site in which participants negotiate new gender identities as both good mothers and independent women.

## **Chapter 4 Participants' journeys to motherhood: becoming an independent woman**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The themes that emerged from the data analysis are organised into two findings chapters. As discussed in the methodology chapter (section 3.3.1), participants frequently reflected on their upbringing and journey to motherhood to make sense of their mothering experiences. This first findings chapter (Chapter 4) presents participants' accounts of their journey to motherhood. The second findings chapter (Chapter 5) focusses on how participants incorporated motherhood into their gender identities, which often involved reflecting on the themes presented in this chapter (Chapter 4). The themes presented in Chapter 5 discuss how participants were reflexively negotiating new gender identities as both good mothers and independent women.

This chapter presents the three themes that captured participants' journeys to motherhood. The first theme (section 4.2) outlines participants' gender socialisation within South Asian family hierarchies, in which traditional gender norms were persistent. The second and third themes discuss two (interlinked) ways in which many participants were pushing the boundaries of traditional gender norms to become independent women. Theme two (section 4.3) focuses on participants' negotiations surrounding access to higher education and work. Such negotiations often delayed and prompted further negotiations regarding marriage and, in some cases, starting a family, which is discussed in theme three (section 4.4).

### **4.2 Gender socialisation within South Asian family hierarchies: the persistence of traditional gender norms**

This theme examines how participants were socialised within South Asian family hierarchies, in which traditional gender norms persisted. Section 4.2.1 outlines how



participants' parents were typically performing traditional gender roles, despite many participants' mothers undertaking paid work. Section 4.2.2 focuses on how participants were typically socialised within extended family hierarchies, perpetuating a gendered hierarchy in which traditional gender norms were also prevalent. Section 4.2.3 outlines how participants were also often socialised within gendered sibling hierarchies. Section 4.2.4 considers how a small number of women discerned changes in their parents' view of gender norms, which shaped their gender socialisation. Overall, the theme shows that participants were socialised with traditional gender norms and within gendered family hierarchies. As subsequent themes discuss (see sections 4.3, 4.4; Chapter 5), participants' position within family hierarchies often shaped their ability to reflexively negotiate new gender identities.

#### **4.2.1 Parents' gender roles and the division of domestic and caring responsibilities**

This section examines how participants' parents usually performed traditional gender roles during participants' upbringing. First, the section considers how traditional gender roles were reproduced for women whose mothers did not undertake paid labour.

A handful of participants were raised in families in which their mothers were full-time, stay-at-home mothers and housewives (see Table 3.2). In these cases, participants' fathers usually worked long hours in low-skilled jobs to provide for the family. Although few participants grew up with such a domestic arrangement, most women considered this domestic set-up as typical within South Asian and British South Asian cultures. For example, Nabeela saw it as the 'norm' for women to become full-time mothers, even though her mother worked full-time. Participants reflected on the persistence of traditional gender norms, as Anita explains: 'Asian women have always been at home'. Participants' gender socialisation had left a lasting imprint on many women in this study. Women like Anita strongly felt the influence

of traditional gender norms: 'it was very difficult because you grew up learning that you've got a role...you've got to be a selfless mum, you've got to cook and clean'. This excerpt captures how women whose mothers did not work often felt a sense of duty to become a full-time mother and housewife. Similarly, Madina describes her upbringing as 'typical' of 'Asian parents'. She was one of the few participants who chose to emulate her mother, whom she describes as a 'serious homemaker'.

However, some of these women reflected that their mothers were somewhat ambivalent about choosing to be stay-at-home mothers. For example, when Safiya's mother was married, she sacrificed her career to become a full-time wife and mother. Safiya expresses how her mother 'chose' to do so. At the same time, Safiya reflected that her mother 'wanted to go back [to her career], but circumstances would not allow it'. Safiya could sense ambivalence in her mother's performance of her gender identity as a mother. Safiya used the word 'choice' but also saw her mother as constrained by 'circumstances':

Honestly speaking, I had my mother in my mind that she, after marriage, she started her family life very soon.... she had her children in the early days of her marriage, so that she can look after them well when she is healthy. Like, I also decided that I have my children early in my marriage  
(Safiya)

Interestingly, Safiya had also put her career aside once she married. In the above excerpt, Safiya is drawing on her mothers' performances of motherhood to justify her own choice to become a traditional full-time mother.

Safiya's mother was one of several first-generation participants' mothers who did not work. However, they usually employed a female 'domestic help'. A 'domestic help' means having

a woman to wash clothes, cooks meals and suchlike. First-generation women regarded female ‘domestic help’ as commonplace for middle- and upper-class families in their native countries, regardless of whether their mothers worked. Indeed, for most women in this study, managing the household was very much gendered, and remained part of the wife/mother’s responsibility, as other research has found (Dickey 2000). Many participants suggested that housework and raising children were a matter of judgement and pride for South Asian women. Anita reflects on how domestic responsibilities remain intertwined with norms of ‘good’ mothering: ‘traditionally, the Asian women have always been at home, but use their houses as a measure of how good housewives they are’.

Parminder’s mother constantly scrutinised her ‘domestic help’, as it was ‘extremely important’ to her mother that such work was carried out to high standards. These findings support research (Dickey 2000) that suggests South Asian women remain judged on their capacities as home-makers, from raising respectable, well-educated children to maintaining their clean, tasteful home, like many mothers (Beagan et al. 2008). Although class and cultural context has been found to shape gender roles in different ways (Cappellini et al. 2014), participants were nevertheless socialised with traditional gender norms.

Whether from a sense of duty or with a degree of ambivalence, participants whose mothers did not work nevertheless had to negotiate traditional gender norms as they sought to become independent women (see sections 4.3 and 4.4). When these participants became mothers themselves, they reflected on their gender socialisation as they both challenged and reproduced traditional gender norms (see section 5.3).

Yet the majority of participants’ mothers were typically involved in some form of paid work (see Table 3.2). Second-generation participants’ mothers (and fathers) usually needed to contribute to household income following their migration to the UK. Their mothers were

generally not educated beyond school age, and worked in low-paid jobs, for example in factories. As Raveena reflects, her mother worked due to 'household necessity', rather than as a challenge to traditional gender norms. Raveena recognised that both her mother and her mother-in-law were not working to pursue an egalitarian division of labour, but were 'carrying two gender roles':

... on one hand you're told, this is your job as a wife, you have to make sure that the kids and the house and everything is you know fine, and that's your area, but then you also have to do a man's job and earn and go out and get some...you know earn a...earn a living. (Raveena)

Raveena regarded this gendered division of labour as an unequal 'burden' on the female members of the family: 'the women did suffer... they had to be the perfect wife, mother, daughter-in-law'. Participants found it difficult to grow up watching their mothers who struggled to challenge the traditional division of labour. Nabeela felt her mother had to 'quickly learn' how to 'provide a household', which meant she had to 'compromise her personality'. Raveena felt that her parents were constrained by traditional gender norms from their native country:

...they become very, quite tight-knit and very ingrained in the way that they think, with the way that everybody else thinks...for our mum and dad's generation it was still kind of like, the Indians do it this way. (Raveena)

These findings support research (Dion and Dion 2001:512) that suggests that female immigrants with low education and low income often face a 'double-burden', by having to fulfil both gender roles.

Participants whose mothers worked outside the home were able to do so mainly because they had easy access to child-care from close female relatives (e.g. by living with/in close proximity to extended kin). Although their mothers worked, participants were usually looked after by female relatives, such as their grandmothers and aunts. Traditional gender norms remained prevalent, as looking after children was still regarded as women's work, as other studies have found (Beagen et al. 2008; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010).

However, several participants' mothers undertook paid work within the home. These participants were also usually second-generation, and their mothers worked out of economic necessity. These participants' mothers tended to have a lack of childcare support, i.e. free childcare arrangements from family/friends. Such work was often linked with factories, which supplied women with machines and materials, paying them on a piecemeal basis. This enabled them to fit the work around their domestic responsibilities, thus maintaining the gendered division of labour in these households. For example, Fatima explained that her mother was fulfilling the role of 'housewife', whilst at the same time:

...she always did bits that she could do from outside. You'll find that in a lot of Asian families, that they do that. So it's, like, she had a big machine, an industrial machine, and she would do work as she could. (Fatima)

Whilst participants' mothers' work from home was often a much-needed source of income, this did not alleviate any of their main responsibilities, meaning that traditional, gendered division of labour was re-produced. Instead, their mothers typically faced intensified work and domestic responsibilities, as other studies of working mothers have found (Hays 1999; Hochschild 1989; Mannino and Deutsch 2007).

Whether their mothers worked or not, the domestic division of labour during participants' upbringing remained firmly gendered along traditional lines. Participants were raised in families where traditional gender roles remained largely unchallenged for their mothers (Nadim 2015). However, in contrast to Nadim's (2015) findings, women in this study often went on to pursue more egalitarian arrangements of domestic labour when they became mothers themselves (discussed in section 5.3). Yet participants were also typically socialised within extended family hierarchies, which also reproduced traditional gender norms, as the next section considers.

#### **4.2.2 Extended family hierarchies and the domestic division of labour**

For many participants, extended family was a common feature of family life. Several participants lived with grandparents in the same house at some point during their upbringing (Table 3.2), and most had extended kin living in very close proximity. Living with or very near to extended family is common in South Asian cultures, which place a strong emphasis on collectivist values (Bhopal 1998; Erdrishinga et al. 2015; see section 2.4). In many cases, participants described their home as the 'main house' in their family. The term 'main house' usually referred to the house where participants' paternal grandparents lived with their son [i.e. these participants' fathers] and his family. Typically, second-generation participants' fathers had migrated in early adulthood and then brought their wives and parents to the UK, whilst often supporting other family members with their migration too. Most first-generation participants had grown up with or in close proximity to their paternal grandparents; sometimes their own families were also nearby.

Participants who lived in the 'main house' often felt that their mothers were under a great deal of pressure from their mothers-in-law (i.e. participants' paternal grandmothers) to undertake most of the domestic work. In Anita's case, her mother was particularly vulnerable

to her mother-in-law's demands. Anita's mother was brought from Pakistan to the UK through marriage at the age of 14, and gave birth to Anita when she was 16 years old. Anita views her paternal grandmother as a controlling figure, who 'bullied and oppressed' Anita's mother into a subservient role within the household. Anita found it difficult to see her mother struggle with this. She felt that her mother was 'always quite on eggshells a lot of the time', and that her mother had to take on a lot of responsibility at such a young age. Ashira reflected a similar account, and felt that her mother had 'suffered' from living with Ashira's grandmother. These women perceived that their mothers' frustration stemmed from their position at the bottom of the gendered family hierarchy, which is the position which new daughters-in-law typically occupy in South Asian families (Kandiyoti 1988).

For those who grew up in the 'main house', extended family hierarchies also had significant ramifications for their own early life-courses. These participants described how the 'main house' was kind of a hub where the family frequently gather. Participants' mothers were responsible for catering to their relatives' demands. For example, Raveena felt that her mother was placed under the 'burden' of catering for relatives who could 'come round at the drop of a hat, at short notice'. Participants were therefore often encouraged to help out their mothers and share their responsibilities (whereas any brothers were not, see section 4.2.3).

As Fatima explains:

I just remember every weekend we'd say sit down and say, right, who's doing the dishes; who's doing the hoovering; who's doing the washing and the ironing and whatnot. So all us sisters used to work together and do that, which was good, in a way, because it used to encourage each other and helped my mum a lot. (Fatima)

Similarly, Nabeela was frequently expected to take on these responsibilities from a young

age. In one instance, when her mother was on an Islamic pilgrimage, she found herself performing her mother's responsibilities: 'I had to do the washing and had to make sure there was a bit of food at home'.

Since extended family members were either living with participants, or could arrive at any moment, participants often felt that they had to compromise their gender identities. In Jasvinder's case, she reflected that her upbringing was akin to 'living in a goldfish bowl', meaning that she had little privacy:

It was busy, it was really busy, and it was very exposed. You have to be proper all of the time, in a sense, you know, it's... You found that you had to hide your emotions a lot of the time because you don't know who was going to come to the door, or who's going to pop over, or whatever.

(Jasvinder)

Here, Jasvinder's depiction of being 'exposed' and having to 'hide your emotions' shows that she felt that she could not express herself openly at home. Jasvinder felt she was subject to constant surveillance or judgement from family members. She expresses how this affected her to a considerable extent:

...it felt very strange in a sense. And especially when you're growing up, you're going through adolescence, you want your own space. Just didn't get much of that, to be honest, and that was a difficult period, I think for me growing up...I became quite introverted after...hitting puberty I became, sort of, very closed up because, you know, there are things that are confusing, but you just don't know who to talk to. (Jasvinder)



This extract illustrates how, for many women in this study, living with and near to extended kin played a significant role in shaping these women's negotiation of their gender identities. Participants were making compromises and often felt a sense of constraint as they negotiated their gender identities. Extended family hierarchies typically played a significant role in further reproducing traditional gender norms during participants' upbringing. However, gendered sibling hierarchies were also highly influential in shaping participants' gender socialisation with traditional norms.

#### **4.2.3 Gendered sibling hierarchies: the significance of gender and birth order**

This section presents gender and birth order as important influences in participants' accounts of their gender socialisation. In many cases, the differential treatment of siblings is intertwined with the extended family hierarchies that were discussed above (section 4.2.2). For instance, participants like Jasvinder and Anita were very aware that they were undertaking aspects of their mother's role in terms of cooking and looking after grandparents, whereas brothers were exempt from these duties. Jasvinder, whose grandmother suffered from a long-term degenerative disease, was expected to 'care for gran' during school holidays 'more so because I was the only daughter, the only girl in the house after mum had gone to work'.

These participants were actively socialised into a traditional South Asian daughter role, mirroring other studies (Ahmad 2001; Bhopal 1997) which suggest that South Asian daughters are expected to play an important role in the domestic division of labour. Even first-generation participants, whose parents employed a 'domestic help' to carry out more arduous tasks, had to undertake household chores. As Safiya explains, she was very aware that her brothers were not expected help out: 'boys never [have to] do that'.

In particular, food consumption practices were an area in which participants found they were treated very differently to their brothers. Participants usually reflected that their mothers, and sometimes grandparents, were strongly reinforcing traditional gender roles. As Jasvinder explains:

...it was the whole kitchen element. The kitchen element was, my mum was quite... she brought us up with a, you know, a bit of a, I don't know really, if you call it strict, if you call it very... orthodox upbringing. You know, girls have a certain role, boys have a certain role. You know, and I was, kind of, made to cook for my grandparents from the age of about nine. So I was making chapattis when I was nine. (Jasvinder)

While Jasvinder had to take part in food preparation from a young age, her brother was free from this responsibility. Similarly, Chanda's brother was also exempt from household work, whereas a key part of her socialisation was linked to cooking and food. She felt she had 'no choice', yet her brother 'didn't have to do anything'. These findings support existing studies that suggest the importance of food consumption in reproducing traditional gender roles from one generation to the next (Moisio et al. 2004; Cappellini and Parsons 2014).

Yet in this study, participants' differential treatment was also linked to daughters' role as future bearers of South Asian cultural traditions and values, as other studies have found (Dasgupta 1998; Dion and Dion 2001; Lindridge et al 2006). Women often felt that they had to constantly manage their behaviour to conform to traditional expectations for South Asian daughters. Namra explained that when she was outside the home, she continued to represent her parents. She felt she was subject to surveillance from the wider community who would report her behaviour to her parents:

...if we were seen to be doing something bad and someone else saw us in the street or my dad or somebody...they'd come to my parents' house and tell my parents. That's how it was, we saw you, you know, and what... That's what it was like, it was like that, and then you came home and you got a right rollicking. (Namra)

Similarly, Jasvinder and Chanda were very aware that their parents gave their brothers far more freedom to socialise with friends. Jasvinder reflected that she was socialised with very different expectations, which involved upholding the family's honour and reputation:

I think it was a fear of, you know, we don't want our daughter to get spoilt, whatever that may mean, whatever connotation that may hold. A girl is a really important element of the family, if there is a daughter in the house. And she is, kind of, I don't know, she's like the embodiment of shame in a sense, and respect. So, if anything happens to her then it's the whole family that gets it, you know, sort of thing (Jasvinder)

This excerpt captures how participants were socialised as South Asian daughters, a role which is strongly intertwined with traditional gender norms. As daughters, they occupied 'a symbolic place as the guardian of family honour and integrity', as Dwyer's (2000:478) research on young South Asian women also found. Their consumption was usually monitored and strongly influenced by the need to preserve family honour much more than boys/men, which supports existing research (Sekhon and Szmigin 2011).

Not only were siblings treated differently according to gender; birth order also impacted on several participants' socialisation. For example, Marjana and Anita were the eldest daughters within their sibling hierarchies. As a result they felt they were treated differently to their

younger siblings, especially their brothers. Marjana felt her parents 'blamed' her for her younger siblings' mistakes: 'I should have, you know, told my brothers and sisters off'. She was also expected to 'give them the food first and what's left you can have'. Her parents revered their sons, who always 'got their own way' and were given preferential treatment over their sisters. This has had a lasting impact on Marjana, who remains affected by her position within this habitus to this day: 'I suffered more...it's taking a long time to get over it'. The gendered sibling hierarchy played a significant role in Marjana's gender socialisation, and suggests that parents' differential treatment of siblings can have a powerful impact in participants' ongoing negotiations of their gender identity.

Even where participants did not have brothers, sibling hierarchies were highly influential in shaping participants' ability to negotiate their gender identity. Elder sisters were often expected to help care for younger siblings as part of their upbringing. A typical example is the case of Nabeela who is the eldest of five daughters. Nabeela was expected to take responsibility for washing and cooking for the family, including her paternal grandparents, 'whereas my sisters wouldn't have done the same because they weren't the eldest'. Her parents' expectations for her to play a mothering role led to a significant upheaval in her life-course. When Nabeela was thirteen, her mother became unwell while expecting her fifth child. Nabeela's parents decided that they would move her from the local state secondary school to a private Muslim girls' school, where the school day finished at twelve thirty in the afternoon. This meant once school had finished she was expected to help her mother care for her younger siblings and take on more domestic work as well.

Nabeela's experience reflects research that has found that within South Asian cultures, eldest daughters are often expected to sacrifice their education in order to help their parents, particularly in poorer households (Chudgar and Shafiq 2010). From when she was 'quite

young', Nabeela's education was compromised to fit with her family's demands, which meant 'I had to make sure that I was already grown up in that sense'. Nabeela felt she had little choice in having to compromise her gender identity.

Participants with elder sisters were also aware of the significance of sibling hierarchies on their gender socialisation. Although, as daughters, they still had to contribute to the domestic labour, they saw themselves as occupying a better position than their elder sisters within the hierarchy. As Namra explains: 'I was a bit spoilt, more spoilt than my [older] sister was because she had to do a lot more'. Women like Namra and Jameela viewed their position, lower down in the sibling hierarchy, as more fortunate, offering them more freedom from domestic responsibilities.

Participants were positioned within gendered family hierarchies which were reproducing traditional gender norms. As sections 4.3 and 4.4 discuss, participants' position within gendered family hierarchies shaped their ability to negotiate their gender identity in complex ways.

#### **4.2.4 Accounts of parents' changing views of gender norms**

This section considers how two participants perceived that their parents were trying to socialise them with less traditional gender norms. Ashira and Naeema recalled that their fathers strongly believed that their daughters should not have to undertake domestic responsibilities. In Naeema's case, she has four older brothers, and felt was 'just treated as one of the lads'. This meant that she was able to play outside with her brothers and was exempt from having to help her mother with the housework. Ashira was the eldest of five children, the youngest of whom is her brother. Like Naeema, Ashira and her sisters did not have to help with the housework (nor did her brother). For both Ashira and Naeema, their

father's justification for their exemption from housework was that these participants could concentrate on their academic studies.

Yet both women's parents performed traditional gender roles, with their fathers working full-time, while their mothers were full-time mothers. Interestingly, neither of these participants' mothers felt able to challenge this traditional division of labour, despite their husbands pushing for less traditional roles for their daughters. Both Ashira and Naeema were different from other participants, in that they felt that their fathers were keen to ensure that their daughters could fully concentrate on their academic studies. Their fathers were keen for their daughters to become university-educated and pursue their careers. These women's accounts reflect findings from other studies which suggest that fathers in diasporic settings can play an integral role in negotiating new gender identity positions for their daughters (Ahmad 2001; Lindridge et al. 2006; Rajiva 2013).

Indeed, many participants, including Naeema and Ashira, regarded negotiations of higher education and marriage as crucial to becoming independent women. This theme has shown how participants reflected on how traditional gender norms were persistent, yet many were developing strategies to negotiate these norms, both within and despite family hierarchies.

#### **4.3 Becoming an independent woman: Negotiating access to higher education and work**

This theme outlines how negotiating access to higher education was a key way in which participants negotiated new gender identities as independent women. Section 4.3.1 outlines how many second- and third-generation Muslim participants felt that going to university was not the norm for South Asian women. Section 4.3.2 suggests that participants who negotiated higher education were 'pushing the boundaries' of gender norms, to different extents. Section 4.3.3 discusses strategies that participants mobilised, including differentiating

between their understandings of ‘culture’ and ‘religion’, positive role-models and their fathers’ encouragement. Section 4.3.4 considers how participants’ negotiations often involved contradictions, tensions and compromises. Throughout this theme, participants’ negotiations were shaped by their position in gendered family hierarchies.

#### **4.3.1 Going to university ‘wasn’t done in that age’**

Whether they were university-educated or not, most second- and third-generation Muslim participants felt that when they reached adulthood, going to university was not the norm for South Asian women. Rafeeqa was aware that for many women, pursuing higher education ‘wasn’t done in that age’, while Namra ‘hadn’t heard of girls going’. Yet only a handful of women in this study did not attend university, which may reflect the nature of the research sample (see section 3.5 for a profile of participants; see section 3.6.2 for reflections on the sample). The few who had not been to university were second-generation Muslim women (see Table 3.2). Most participants, including many Muslim women, had negotiated access to university as they sought to become independent women.

Typically, women who had not been to university were raised in working-class families with little or no expectation of doing so. For instance, Zahara felt that ‘[university] just wasn’t for me’ as she received little encouragement from her parents. Similarly Namra did not regard university as an option available to her: ‘girls weren’t really seen as...going to college’. These participants tended to associate a lack of familial encouragement with their parents’ traditional view of gender roles:

My mum made out that... you know, we’re the women and we have to stay home and this is what we do... in our culture, they’ll say, oh, a girl has to stay home and cook for her husband and look after the family and she can’t

go to college and she can't go studying and she can't work...I think it's all down to my parents not being educated (Marjana)

Moreover, these participants felt that their parents continue to hold traditional gender roles *because* their parents were not educated. Participants' (lack of) choice was shaped by traditional gender roles, but also by their position as South Asian daughters of working-class migrants with low levels of education. They usually expressed that they did not regard university as an option open to them, which they felt was due to their parents remaining 'stuck' in their traditional views. To a significant degree, the possibility of university seemed to be foreclosed for these participants. These participants felt that their parents lacked an awareness of the role that education could play in terms of social mobility:

They didn't discourage us but they didn't exactly encourage us and say this is the route you have to go because they were illiterate really...my mum didn't really have much clue...about academical [sic]...I think if my parents were a little bit more au fait with education and that, then things would have been different for maybe all of us. (Namra)

These women's parents seemed to be lacking in cultural capital and reflexivity to encourage their children into higher education. Yet research suggests that South Asian immigrants are typically more likely to push for their children's education and social mobility than their white, working-class counterparts (Modood 2004; Thapar-Bjorket and Sanghera 2010). However, these participants' parents did not seem to hold such educational aspirations. Furthermore, these women also lacked positive role models within their habitus (e.g. Namra 'hadn't heard of girls going'), which can sometimes provide South Asian families with a source of social capital and mobility (Thapar-Bjorket and Sanghera 2010). Overall, within these women's habitus there was a 'limited exposure' to higher education opportunities,



much like the working-class women in Allen's (2002:523) research on consumer choice in higher education.

Participants who did not attend university often regarded themselves as more limited in terms of their career choice and earning potential. Many regretted not pursuing their education further. As Namra reflects: 'it would have been a lot easier, you're in control of your own future rather than having to stick to something you're not happy with'. Their route to becoming an independent woman was dependent on finding a job to support themselves, and, crucially, negotiating their marriage to a 'suitable husband' (discussed in section 4.4).

However, the majority of women in this study did manage to negotiate access to higher education, which played a significant role as they pushed the boundaries and performed new gender identities.

#### **4.3.2 Negotiating access to higher education as 'pushing boundaries'**

Given that several second- and third-generation Muslim participants felt that going into higher education was not the norm for South Asian women, it is perhaps not surprising that those who were university-educated often viewed themselves as different from 'other' women in their social milieu. Yet several participants saw themselves as challenging and transforming gender norms. Ashira felt that she was 'pushing the boundaries', while Madina saw herself as 'breaking ground' for women in her extended family. Ashira believed that she and her family hold very different views on gender norms and women's education than her in-laws. She compared herself to her sisters-in-law, who are 'all housewives'. By referring to herself as 'the fun one', Ashira saw herself as more independent:

[My sisters-in-law] have always made kind of an exception for me anyway, I'm educated...the fun one, who has a job sort of thing, while they're all housewives (Ashira)

Although Bagguley and Hussain (2016:57) propose that South Asian women's attendance at university has gone from 'exceptional' in the late 1970s to 'routine in the present century', women in this study continued to regard themselves as 'exceptional' compared to other South Asian women they knew. While second- and third-generation Muslim participants felt gaining a degree was pushing boundaries, non-Muslim participants like Raveena reflected that they were doing so by negotiating post-graduate qualifications: 'in my family I'm one of the first ones to go into postgraduate education'.

As graduates, and sometimes post-graduates, participants' pursuit of higher education remained a marker of difference compared to other women within their social context, contrasting to Bagguley and Hussain's (2016:57) study which suggests that higher education is often seen as 'routine' for young South Asian women. These participants were negotiating access to university during the 1990s and early 2000s, a time that saw rapid increases in the number of women attending university (Bagguley and Hussain 2016). For these women, being seen as an exception was an important part of their new gender identity:

...a couple of them [cousins and siblings], they saw my graduation picture and they were, like, wow, that's really cool, so I'm glad...funnily enough, I felt the same when I saw my uncle's graduation photos. (Madina)

They were proud to act as role-models who were pushing boundaries, not just for themselves, but for other women. This excerpt also captures how extended families may often hold differing views regarding women's education. Although access to university is increasing

(Bagguley and Hussain 2016), the transmission and transformation of gender norms within family hierarchies may still be rather uneven, as traditional gender norms are both re-produced and challenged.

### **4.3.3 Strategies for negotiating access to higher education**

This section outlines several strategies that participants mobilised as they negotiated access to higher education. These strategies helped them to pursue new gender identities as independent women. Section 4.3.3.1 considers how many second-generation Muslim participants often developed their own understandings of ‘culture’ and ‘religion’ to reflexively challenge gender norms. Section 4.3.3.2 focuses on the use of positive role-models, while section 4.3.3.3 suggests that participants’ fathers’ views also helped women to negotiate access to higher education.

#### **4.3.3.1 Differentiating between understandings of ‘culture’ and ‘religion’**

Reflecting on their understanding of ‘culture’ and ‘religion’ was a key strategy that was used, particularly by second-generation Muslim participants. For many of these women, differentiating between what they perceive as ‘culture’ and ‘religion’ was important in developing an understanding of how they could re-work gender norms, supporting Ramji’s (2007) findings. Madina’s view was typical: ‘I like to separate culture and religion...culture versus religion...is where a lot of the problems lie’.

The dichotomy of ‘culture versus religion’ is subtly different to a ‘traditional-Western dichotomy’ (Ramji 2007:1182). Participants were not resisting or ‘turning their backs’ on their cultural and religious heritage, and becoming westernised, in contrast to Bhopal’s (1998) findings. Instead, women in this study were developing new understandings of ‘culture’ and ‘religion’. Participants perceived traditional gender norms as part of South

Asian culture, rather than their religion (usually, Islam). Ashira reflects: 'it's the culture that's twisted it, that the woman must stay indoors, she must be covered head to toe, [and] she's not allowed to work'. Similarly, Jameela regarded 'culture' as responsible for promoting traditional gender norms in which 'the girl should be at home and she should stay at home and the men go out for work'. In differentiating between 'religion' and 'culture', these participants were 'actively transforming' gender norms, much like the women in Ramji's study (2007:1182).

These participants were usually keen to reflect that their views of 'culture' and 'religion' were different to the views of their parents and/or older generations within the family hierarchy. Madina had learned to 'strip back culture from the actual religion', which had allowed her to reflect that, within her family, traditional gender norms were often 'confused' with religion. These participants were 'not about to abandon' their religion (Ramji 2007:1182). Rather, they were reflexively transforming their understanding of religion to justify their university education, as others have found (Ahmad 2001; Bagguley and Hussain 2016).

Indeed, for many second-generation Muslim participants, differentiating between 'culture' and 'religion' also meant learning more about Islam. Ashira was aware that the Qur'an supported women's education: '[in] our religion yes, of course I'm allowed to work'. She developed a new understanding of Islam: 'I don't believe that religion constrains you. I've had everything I could possibly want, and I get freedom from it too'. As women like Ashira and Jameela began to reflexively re-interpret their religion, they were developing a form of cultural or 'religious capital', supporting the findings of several studies (Franceschelli and O'Brien 2014:9; Ramji 2007). For Muslim participants, their pursuit of their education was 'a way of being a better Muslim', much like the participants in Ramji's study (2007:1182).

This strategy of developing new understandings of ‘culture’ and ‘religion’ would continue to play a key role in these women’s mothering practices, as they reflexively used these strategies to socialise their own children (see section 5.4).

#### **4.3.3.2 Positive role-models within family hierarchies**

For several participants, positive role-models within their family ‘paved the way’ for participants to enter into negotiations regarding higher education, as others have found (Ahmad 2001:147; Crozier and Davies 2006). Positive role-models were typically older female family members. For example, Hashini was ‘encouraged’ to study by her cousins and aunts, who had been to university and secured ‘really good jobs in Sri Lanka’. Occasionally, male family members were also viewed as role models, which was the case for Madina, who was inspired by both her uncle’s graduation photographs and her cousins’ examples.

For participants who were the first sibling to attempt such negotiations, like Madina and Nabeela, positive role-models within the extended family could be drawn on for support and encouragement. However, positive role-models were also an important source of information to find out about what was involved in going to university. As Madina explains: ‘it was kind of good to sort of get a bit more clued up as to what it is and what happens’. This was particularly helpful given that these women’s parents were not usually educated beyond school age and so were unable to help, as similar studies have found (Crozier and Davies 2006; Shah et al. 2010). Such information, gained from positive role-models, was a key source of social capital for these participants.

Some women reflected that their position further down the sibling hierarchy meant they were more likely to have positive role-models to follow. In these cases, participants were also aware that their elder sisters were constrained by their position at the top of the hierarchy. In

Rafeeqa's family, 'number one [sister]' did not go to university, but went straight into work to support her parents. This was partly because university 'wasn't the done back in the day', but also part of a South Asian cultural expectation for the eldest sibling to contribute to household income. Similarly, Ameena's eldest sister felt obliged to go straight into work after she left school: 'she thought, she needs to have that responsible head and work'. Yet 'from number two onwards', Rafeeqa and her sisters progressed to college and university. Rafeeqa recalls that she met with little resistance from her parents when she asked to go to university, although they had not actively encouraged her to do so.

Yet negotiating higher education also impacted on participants' negotiations of marriage, as other studies have also found (Bagguley and Hussain 2016; Mohee 2011). In some cases, like Ameena and Rafeeqa, participants' parents appeared to accept their daughters' wish to go to university with the understanding that marriage plans would be 'delayed' until after they have graduated (see sections 4.3.3.4 and 4.4). Most participants felt South Asian women were usually expected to marry at a young age. Parminder's view was typical: 'there is a general feeling' that 'you should get married early...by 25 at least'. Through delaying marriage, higher education played a significant role in opening up ways for participants to negotiate new gender identities. In negotiating their higher education, most participants shared similar aspirations to the women in Ahmad's (2001:145) study, in the sense that they were keen not to become 'solely dependent on (and perhaps subordinate to) their future husbands and in-laws'. Indeed, in some cases, participants' fathers also shared their daughter's aspirations, as discussed in the following section (4.3.3.3).

#### **4.3.3.3 Parental encouragement: fathers' influential role**

Some women reflected that their fathers were keen for their daughters to attend university. For example, Naeema views her father as 'very pro-education', while Fatima recalls that her

father was ‘a firm believer that we all needed to go to university’. Research has suggested that South Asian parents’ encouragement of their daughters’ education is ‘a given’ (Ahmad 2001; Lindridge and Hogg 2006; Rajiva 2013). However, second- and third-generation Muslim participants often suggested otherwise; they tended to regard their fathers as exceptions to the norm. They felt their fathers were challenging the norm for daughters to finish school and become housewives. Ashira described her father as an ‘exception [as he] has always been a bit unique’ in wanting his daughters to become educated. Similarly, Naeema thought that her father was ‘quite forward thinking for his time’. These participants saw their fathers’ encouragement as playing an important part in their gender identity negotiations. Just as they view themselves as ‘pushing boundaries’, they also recognised changes in their fathers’ views of gender norms.

When asked to explain their fathers’ encouragement, these participants often saw their fathers’ motives as linked to social mobility. Some linked their fathers’ encouragement with stories of migration. For instance Jameela’s father ‘always believes in education’ as a route out of poverty. Having come from a ‘very poor background’ in India, he managed to get a scholarship to study medicine and eventually came to the UK as a GP. As a result he strongly encouraged Jameela and her siblings to pursue higher education. Ensuring social mobility was also a concern for fathers of some first-generation, non-Muslim women:

...my father always said that you need to study and that's what will be left to you at the end... the day we can't support you or we are no longer there, you need to earn for yourself, so it's about what you study and how you are going to start ...earning to have your lifestyle. (Hashini)

This excerpt also captures how fathers’ encouragement was linked with ensuring daughters’ independence and safety: ‘the day we can’t support you...you need to earn for yourself’.

These women's fathers were also keen for their daughters to become independent women. For most women in this study, becoming 'independent', through education, would result in having a career or well-paid job. As Fatima explains:

My dad was a firm believer that we needed to all go to uni and have our own career. He'd had that instilled in all of us... He said to us don't rely on your husbands (Fatima)

Participants like Fatima perceive their fathers as 'instilling' the notion that having a good education and career would act as a 'safety net' from potential mistreatment from husbands or in case of divorce, much like Ahmad's (2001:143) study suggests. As Hashini explains, their fathers were trying to protect their daughters in case they married a husband who would not treat their daughters with respect:

With my father, [my mum] has no restrictions, she can do anything, but you don't know who you are going to have at the end of the day. So it's nice to be independent. (Hashini)

Moreover, several women suggest that their fathers regarded higher education, and therefore better career potential, as a means to negotiate a better position within (future) family hierarchies. This is articulated clearly by Ashira:

He always said he wanted us to never worry about anything. And I think actually from what I understand he knew more than he let on about my mum and my grandma, you know he knew more about it and for him it was always that my daughters aren't going to suffer like that ... Dad was always 'girl power'... So dad was always like...he used to say that a successful woman has three Cs, a career, children and cash. (Ashira)



Here, Ashira sensed that her father was aware of the persistence of traditional gender norms and family hierarchies. She regarded her father's mantra of 'career, children and cash' as a means of enabling his daughter to challenge (future) traditional South Asian family hierarchies. Ashira reflected that her father's encouragement was his way of ensuring that his daughters would be less susceptible to their (future) mother-in-law's potential demands. Rather than simply being a 'safety-net' for marriage breakdown or financial hardship, as Ahmad (2001:145) purports, Ashira regarded her father's views as a strategy to minimise the possibility of 'suffering' as part of an extended family hierarchy. In drawing on their fathers' encouragement, they perceived a potential for circumventing their lower position (as daughters-in-law) within gendered family hierarchies. This might explain why these participants often saw their fathers as 'unique'. They saw their fathers as playing a part in their attempts to push boundaries, as Ashira implies: 'dad was always 'girl power''.

Yet at the same time, participants could often also sense tensions alongside their parents' encouragement. Section 4.3.4 considers how participants' negotiations of higher education were often negotiated in complex and sometimes contradictory ways.

#### **4.3.4 Contradictions, tensions and compromises**

As participants negotiated access to university, they often reflected that they had, nevertheless, continued to receive differential treatment from their parents. One of the main ways that this became apparent was in negotiating the location of the university, which impacted directly on women's living arrangements and ability to socialise. This was particularly noticeable among Muslim women who felt the most restricted in this respect:

That's quite a cultural norm - it's expected [for women] to stay at home, and it's very disapproved of for young... I'm not sure how the Sikh, Hindu

community are now, but definitely the Muslim community are very disapproving of women living on their own, so it's expected [for] them to stay at home. (Anita)

Muslim participants were usually expected to live at home, which meant that their choice of university was limited to local universities. Often these women felt frustrated by their limited choice, particularly when they had brothers who were allowed to study further afield and live away from home. For instance, Naeema's father 'insisted' she went to the local university while her brothers moved away to study at leading institutions. Given that her father had always treated her as 'one of the boys' and pushed for his daughter's education (see section 4.2.4), Naeema 'resented' her father's differential treatment for her own educational path:

I wanted to live away, I wanted to go to university outside of [my home city] you know...my three brothers who had gone to university prior to me had all moved out of [our home city]... So it wasn't until I was, I suppose, a lot older when this, you know, [I noticed] that there were certain, you know, differences. (Naeema)

This excerpt captures how some participants' fathers were both encouraging their daughters to go to university, but at the same limiting their choice and participation. Indeed, in Naeema's case, it seems that her parents' differential treatment of siblings based on gender only became apparent to her once she came to negotiate higher education and later reflected on her situation.

Others found that their differential treatment was not only based on gender but also intertwined with sibling hierarchies. Being the first born girl to attend university often meant

that these women had less choice in university, living away from home and socialising. For example, Ashira felt that ‘there was a lot more restriction’ placed on her, because she was ‘the first girl, the first-born to go to uni’. Like Naeema, Ashira also found these restrictions somewhat contradictory to their father’s attempts to ‘push’ for their daughter’s education. In one sense, she felt that her father was ‘proud’ as he was ‘pushing’ for her to go, but at the same time:

...it was a lot like... you know uni’s got pubs and stuff around the corners,  
don’t go there, make sure you’re not seen around in that area and stuff.  
(Ashira)

Participants’ subject choice was also sometimes a source of contradictions, mirroring Bagguley and Hussain’s (2016) findings. In Ashira’s case, her father allowed her to study engineering ‘because my talents were there’. However, since there were ‘only boys’ in her class, her father went to considerable lengths to restrict her social movements:

So for the first few times every time he came to pick me up, because I  
didn’t have my own car, I wasn’t allowed that, he would drop me and it  
was like a system, someone would come pick me up, someone would drop  
me, and they’d see me with all these guys and they were like, oh dear, oh  
dear, but they never said anything. (Ashira)

This excerpt suggests that elder siblings like Ashira felt these restrictions were a frustrating part of their negotiations. Yet they also saw their negotiations as worthwhile, not only for themselves, but by ‘pushing the boundaries’ for younger female siblings too, much like the participants in Ramji’s (2007) study.

While these women's fathers were trying to be different by encouraging their daughters, it seems that they struggled to break free from a tendency to treat their daughters differently. Nabeela's father grappled with his decision to allow his daughter to study away from home to a significant extent. At first, he allowed her to live away for just over the first year of her studies. However, he later changed his mind and 'insisted' that she quit her studies. He allowed Nabeela to transfer to a university closer to home (which meant repeating a year), so that she could live with her cousin. At the time, Nabeela felt powerless to challenge the situation: 'I felt like I was left with no choice...he basically once he put his foot down that was it'. Her father's decision was something that Nabeela still finds upsetting to this day, referring to this episode of her life as part of her 'scarred past'. Yet she was determined that her younger sisters would not experience the same as her: 'I said to my sister...if push comes to shove...don't listen to dad'. These women's fathers seemed to want to assert some control over their daughters, despite trying to push for a better position for their daughters in their (future) family hierarchies.

If Muslim participants' negotiations often centred on location and subject choice, non-Muslim women in this study had to justify their strivings for post-graduate education. In Jasvinder's case, she describes how she 'had to fight' to study for her doctorate, which her parents saw as 'problematic' as she had already spent four years studying. These participants' parents were often concerned because they were keen for daughters to marry and start a family. In Chanda's case, her parents refused to offer financial support for her to pursue a professional qualification, but were happy to fund her brother despite him quitting several courses. Women like Chanda felt that their parents had different expectations for brothers, who seemed to have far more freedom:

...they did support us to become educated and they definitely supported that, but then it was like they wanted me to just stop studying and get married and have a family whereas they're not bothered about him  
(Chanda)

Participants felt that their parents were often under pressure from elder members of the family hierarchy, who saw 'investing in' daughters' education as jeopardising future marriage prospects. For example, Jasvinder's grandfather felt there was 'no point' in her pursuing her doctorate. He feared that her parents would not be able to 'find a husband for her' as she would be 'too educated', and advised her parents to: 'concentrate on your son'. As a result, these women described having to 'fight' for their post-graduate qualifications, as their parents withheld their financial support. As Jasvinder explains:

I said, I'll get funding, and I'll get a job, and if that's the way I have to see myself through my PhD I'll do it, and I did. So, I got work in the department, and it was a ridiculous amount of hours just to pay rent and subsistence (Jasvinder)

Some participants also found that while their fathers were pushing for their daughters' higher education, their mothers were rather ambivalent in their support. Often they felt their mothers were torn between supporting their daughters and ensuring their daughters marry and start a family. Ashira's mother 'always followed through' her father's wishes for Ashira to be educated, even though 'deep down mum would have loved it' if Ashira had 'got married a bit earlier and had lots of kids'. Raveena reflected that this concern for daughters to marry was part of the role of a traditional South Asian mother:

...my mum...was a bit more concerned about...when are you going to get married and have kids and what if you incur problems...It's an Asian mentality...she just...wants the best for you...and the best, in her mind, is for you to be married and settled, and you have kids. (Raveena)

Here, Raveena views her mother as holding onto an 'Asian mentality', but only because her mother wanted 'the best' for her daughter. However, Raveena also later reflected that her mother's 'concern' was 'more for me' than her brother. In order to try to alleviate her mother's concerns, Raveena came up with her own 'five year plan'. Her solution was to find the 'right' husband, then complete her PhD. This would enable her to fit her career aspirations around marriage and starting a family. Indeed, for the majority of women in this study, negotiating access to university also opened up possibilities for negotiating marriage, supporting the findings of recent research (Bagguley and Hussain 2016).

#### **4.4 Becoming an independent woman: Finding a suitable husband and starting a family**

This theme outlines how participants' negotiations surrounding marriage and starting a family played a significant role in negotiating their gender identities as independent women. Section 4.4.1 suggests that for most participants (and often their parents), finding a 'suitable husband', who treats women with respect, was a key part of becoming an independent woman. Section 4.4.2 outlines how a small number of participants had little or no choice in finding a 'suitable husband' for their first marriages. Section 4.4.3 suggests that, once married, participants were typically expected to start a family straight away. Women negotiated this norm to differing extents, which often had a profound impact on how they negotiated their gender identities as both good mothers and independent women (see section 5.2).

Throughout the theme, it is suggested marriage was very important for women in this study; they were not rejecting marriage, or even arranged marriage, per se. However, they were challenging norms surrounding marriage, by trying to find a 'suitable husband', and some were also challenging the expectations of when to start a family.

#### **4.4.1 Finding a 'suitable' husband: someone with a 'shared mentality'**

This section considers how the majority of participants (and often their parents) sought to find a 'suitable' husband who treats women with respect. The process of finding a 'suitable husband' often began with participants' parents making enquiries within their extended family hierarchies and friendship networks. Typically these women referred to these enquiries using words that convey a sense of formality and trust. Aameena described her parents' enquiries as making 'a character reference check'. Raveena referred to a 'network' or a 'web' of contacts that can give families a sense of the potential husband's background. She saw this network as 'their own pre-Facebook version of friends and family'. Raveena explained that within these networks there is usually 'somebody who is a matchmaker type person' who can 'put the word out' that they are looking for a husband.

Typically, participants (and their parents) had a set of standards or expectations that they used to select potential husbands. For Namra, 'he had to meet certain criteria on our lists', such as being 'decent' or 'respectable' and, if possible, 'well-educated'. Yet some participants, like Namra, sometimes questioned their parents' views of the 'criteria'. For example, she found that being 'well-educated' did not necessarily make someone a suitable husband. Having considered several 'well-educated' men, she realised that 'some [of these men] expected that the woman wasn't an equal' and 'felt that they were superior'. Similarly Raveena recalls that she and her parents considered 'how he would treat women' as particularly important. She was very wary of 'ending up with...some chauvinistic idiot' who

‘didn’t appreciate women’, which she regarded as ‘kind of prevalent in our society’. As Namra explains: ‘it has to be a joint thing’ with ‘someone who would give me respect’ and ‘treat me right’. A ‘suitable husband’, for most participants, meant someone who had an egalitarian view of gender norms, in which women were equally as important and respected in their marriage. They wanted husbands who would support them as independent women.

In many cases, women valued their parents’ help in introducing possible husbands. Participants and their parents wanted to enquire not only about the ‘guy’ himself, but also the family in which he was raised. As Raveena explains:

[We were looking for] a respectable family who've got similar values, I suppose. Who have got a shared mentality, I suppose, you can say. Because there's always the fear that you get into a marriage and you're not happy. And it's not necessarily the husband that doesn't make you happy, it's the extended family and the extra people that you marry with him.

(Raveena)

Women like Raveena typically saw their parents’ role as trying to reduce this ‘fear’. They did so by trying to ensure that there was a ‘shared mentality’, based on egalitarian gender norms, between their daughters, their potential husbands and his family.

For many participants, finding a ‘suitable husband’ was also a means of trying to ensure that they could negotiate a more favourable position within their new family hierarchy. Traditionally, daughters-in-laws assume a position at the bottom of the gendered family hierarchy (Allendorf 2015; Bhopal 1998; see section 2.4.2). Most participants were aware of the norm of moving into a ‘joint home’ with their future mothers-in-law. As Raveena expressed: ‘you’re the one doing all the moving...you have to be a bit more cautious’. A



‘shared mentality’ was crucial in terms of ensuring a favourable position in their future family hierarchy.

Several participants chose to marry a first-generation husband. These men were usually part of their family, or known to the family, in their native country. Participants usually met their husbands whilst visiting family abroad. Importantly, they ensured that their husbands held an egalitarian view of gender norms. For instance, Ameena reflected she and her husband ‘shared’ the view that both husbands and wives should work and share domestic responsibilities. A key implication of marrying a first-generation husband was that their husbands’ parents were not already living in the UK, and were less likely to migrate (presumably due to visa restrictions). In Ashira’s case, she and her parents were keen to ensure that any future mother-in-law could not cause her to ‘suffer’ like her own mother did. She even joked that ‘the first rule [was that] any guy we brought home had to have a dead mum’. Marrying a first-generation husband enabled these women to circumvent their husbands’ extended family hierarchy and remain close to their own family.

While participants were raised with different expectations of how they would marry, their negotiations nonetheless centred on finding a ‘suitable husband’. Most participants did so by having an ‘arranged marriage’ or being ‘introduced’ to someone via their parents. However, several women described themselves as having ‘love marriages’. A ‘love marriage’ was usually defined in contrast to arranged marriages. These women instigated the search process, however parental approval was still required, which often involved parents making enquiries about the potential husband. Regardless of whether they had an introduction, arranged marriage or love marriage, most participants (and their parents) were keen to find a husband with a ‘shared mentality’ regarding gender norms.

However, a few women in this study have experienced divorce; their first marriages were arranged with little consideration of finding a 'suitable husband'. For these women, becoming an independent woman was much more difficult.

#### **4.4.2 Forced marriage, domestic abuse and divorce**

Three participants, Anita, Mahira and Marjana, felt that they were given very little choice in their first marriages, and attempts to find a 'suitable husband' were noticeably absent from these women's accounts. All of these women were second-generation Muslim women of Pakistani heritage, who had since divorced and remarried. At the time of their first marriage, they were positioned within family hierarchies that were particularly constraining. They were raised to expect little or no choice in their marriage. As Marjana explains: 'we've been brought up thinking that...there's no such thing as getting married to whoever you want to'. Both Marjana and Mahira were the eldest daughters within larger sibling hierarchies and their parents did not encourage them to attend college (let alone university). Their gender socialisation is similar to portrayals of 'traditional' South Asian women in Bhopal's study, for whom arranged marriage is 'part of the socialisation process' (Bhopal 1997:488). On the other hand, Anita was permitted to attend university. However during her studies she came under a significant amount of pressure from her parents to consent to a transnational arranged marriage to a Pakistani man. Anita felt strongly that she 'did not want' to marry this man but that she was 'heavily coerced into it' by emotional pressure from her family.

These participants also experienced domestic abuse and divorce. They described their first marriages as a turbulent and very difficult period of their lives, as they struggled to come to terms with their situation in unstable relationships. Often these women felt further constrained by concerns over their (and their families') reputations. For example, Mahira's first husband would 'talk about me and my family to other people'. Mahira explains, 'I was

quiet for the community’ because she felt that ‘if I leave him, people will talk, my relatives will talk, the community will talk’. In Marjana’s case, she felt that her parents, especially her mother, constrained and discouraged her from leaving the marriage. Instead her mother told her to ‘bow down’ and ‘apologise’ to her first husband because ‘he’s the guy and you’re the girl’, whether ‘it was my fault or not’.

As these women divorced their first husbands, they began to reflect on their difficult experiences. Despite the significant upheaval and distress, divorce had brought about new opportunities for them to reflect on their gender identities and push the boundaries of gender norms. As Marjana explains:

I think in our culture our own people have put our own religion down and I’ve always been brought up in that way, thinking, yes, the women have got to stay in and they’ve got to do this and it was only with my divorce that I realised, no, you know, that’s not right. We have got the freedom to go out and work, we have got the freedom to go out and do whatever we want. (Marjana)

These women began to question their understandings of ‘culture’ and ‘religion’, a strategy also used by other second-generation Muslim participants to negotiate access to higher education (see section 4.3.3.1). They did so by learning more about their religion, mirroring the findings of other studies of young Muslim women (Mohee 2011; Ramji 2007). In Marjana’s case, she ‘started to read Islamic books’. She reflexively questioned her own experiences and beliefs: ‘was this right, was that wrong - what does our religion say?’ In doing so, she developed a ‘deeper’ understanding of Islam:

I've turned myself round and I've become more religious, I would say, you know, because I liked what I heard and what I listened to, and culture-wise I've thrown that out of the window because I didn't like that bit. It put a completely different picture on it. (Marjana)

This excerpt illustrates how women like Marjana learned to differentiate their understanding of 'culture' and 'religion', and were able to develop a form of cultural or 'religious capital', as other studies have found (Franceschelli and O'Brien 2014:9; Ramji 2007). These participants each went on to consider further educational qualifications and re-engage with their career aspirations, suggesting that they were starting to negotiate their identities as independent women. They also went on to re-marry, and they were usually more involved in negotiating their second marriages. Like other participants, these subsequent negotiations centred on finding a 'suitable husband' who would treat them with respect. As Mahira explains, she sought a 'shared' understanding of gender norms; her second husband 'did not want a typical wife' to cook and clean for him.

As participants negotiated access to higher education, marriage, and, in these few cases, divorce, they negotiated new gender identities as independent women. However, participants were typically expected to start a family very soon after they had married, as discussed in section 4.4.3.

#### **4.4.3 Starting a family: Motherhood as 'a spanner in the works'?**

Most women in this study referred to a norm in which women are expected to start a family as soon as they are married, which is common in South Asian cultures (Wells and Dietsch 2014). Fareeda explains: 'in our culture it's, like, as soon as you get married, it's baby straight away'. Similarly, Parminder felt that 'there is this general feeling in India that you

should have children as fast as possible'. Most participants did not refer to making a conscious decision to start trying for a baby:

...you don't have an option...Well, it's just the 'done' thing. So you just like accept it as the 'done' thing, so you get married and then have children. It's just like normal. It's just normal. (Ameena)

Indeed, several second-generation Muslim participants suggested that when women did not fall pregnant soon after marriage, they would be asked to justify and explain their situation. In Rafeeqa's case, it took four years for her to become pregnant. She felt 'a big stress...in the words of the community, why isn't she getting pregnant'. When she 'eventually' became pregnant 'everyone thought I went for IVF because I was having twins.'

Given this expectation to have children soon after marriage, many participants frequently expressed a sense in which motherhood conflicted with their gender identities as independent women. Having pushed the boundaries of gender norms as they negotiated higher education and marriage (see sections 4.3 and 4.4), most participants viewed work as an important part of being an independent women. As Parminder explains: 'work is very important to me...it's a part of my identity'. Experiencing a loss of independence on becoming a mother is not unique to South Asian women, as many women struggle to terms with the responsibility of having a child (Voice Group 2010b). However, women in this study often seemed acutely aware of how motherhood could jeopardise their gender identity as independent women.

For several participants, finding out that they were pregnant was not always a positive experience, but one that symbolised a loss of independence. Naeema found it 'difficult to accept' that she was pregnant, which she saw as a disruption to her career and gender identity as an independent woman:

I wasn't necessarily joyful about it, you know, I kind of felt this is, you know, I've put a spanner in the works, you know, in terms of what I foresaw for my, kind of, you know, that immediate future. (Naeema)

For these women, becoming a mother meant giving up their freedom. Fareeda remembers crying to her husband and feeling a sense of loss, explaining that: 'it's all that I had to let go of'. She feared she had lost part of her identity as an independent woman.

Many women had faced an ongoing struggle to negotiate their education, career and marriage. Having overcome divorce and started to pursue her career, Anita found motherhood 'a real shock...it took longer to accept that I'm a mum now'. Similarly, within months of securing her first teaching position, Nabeela fell pregnant. She saw coming to terms with motherhood as a 'battle' as it meant that her career had 'taken a snap'. As Nabeela explains, 'all this has come from... you know, all this has come from me pushing and shoving'. Chanda reflected that she had fought hard for her independence, yet found herself 'battling with' the fact that she had become pregnant. She had 'worked so hard to get to a certain point', but found that becoming a mother was 'out of my control'. Facing the prospect of losing their independence was a daunting and sometimes distressing prospect that these women had to negotiate.

In particular, women who were less pro-active about managing when they became pregnant seemed to view motherhood as more of a threat to their identity as independent women. Having negotiated access to higher education, most women had managed to delay their marriage, often until after they had secured a job. These women were reflexively aware that they had pushed the boundaries surrounding marriage, as Jameela explained: 'in the Asian community, I'd got married fairly late'. However, in some cases, marrying later meant that participants were concerned that they may encounter difficulties in conceiving a child.

Several women were less proactive in planning the timing of their pregnancy once they were married, as Aameena explains: 'straightaway I got pregnant, probably on the wedding day'. Similarly Chanda feared she may have 'left it too late' to start a family, but was then shocked at how quickly she fell pregnant.

However, other (mainly non-Muslim) participants appeared to be more proactive and in control of negotiating when they became pregnant. Like most women in this study, they were often encouraged by their family to start a family, but had usually agreed with their husbands to wait for the 'right time'. For example, Hashini explained that although 'my mother and his mother started to ask when are the grandchildren coming', they ensured that their children were 'carefully timed'. The 'right time' generally meant fitting in with their higher education, career and marriage plans. Similarly, Raveena had resisted pressure from her mother by reassuring her that she was making plans for starting a family. Raveena had put her 'five year plan' in place to ensure that she got married and completed her PhD before they started a family. These women were continuing to push the boundaries of gender norms, by resisting the norm to have children as soon as they were married.

As a result of being more in control, women who delayed having children largely seemed to find motherhood as less of a challenge to their identity as independent women. Jasvinder explains: 'it was just the next stage for us ...we were mentally ready'. She seemed better able to demarcate her maternity leave as 'time where I need to play, put my mother hat on'. She had accepted that motherhood meant putting her career on hold: 'I thought, let me get this part of my journey, my story done now and then I'll carry on with things afterwards'. Similarly Raveena recognised that she would need to spend several months with their baby, after which she could 'get into my career as well'. While these women did seem to view

motherhood as a disruption to their identity as independent women, they had continued to challenge gender norms, through taking more control of the timing of motherhood.

#### **4.5 Concluding remarks to this chapter**

This chapter has outlined participants' journeys to motherhood. Most were socialised with traditional gender norms, which were both reproduced and challenged as they sought to become independent women. They did so by negotiating access to higher education and work, as well as negotiating their marriage to a 'suitable husband'. However, most women did not challenge the norm of getting pregnant soon after marriage. Typically, participants regarded motherhood as a challenge to their identities as independent women. Those who did not manage to delay the timing of their pregnancy were particularly susceptible to viewing motherhood as a 'spanner in the works'. Women who resisted the norm to have children quickly, by delaying having children until they were ready, were better able to accept their transition to a new life-role.

The second findings chapter (Chapter 5) discusses how participants learned how to become a good mother and an independent woman, with consumption practices playing a key role. As participants negotiated the norms of intensive motherhood within gendered family hierarchies, they sought to incorporate motherhood into their gender identities. Despite motherhood often being seen as a 'spanner in the works', many women continued to push the boundaries of gender norms.



## **Chapter 5      Participants' experiences of motherhood: Becoming a good mother *and* an independent woman**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter focusses on how participants were negotiating new gender identities as both good mothers and independent women. Participants' negotiations were often shaped by their position within family hierarchies. Three themes are presented, capturing participants' experiences of motherhood. The first theme (section 5.2) focuses on two key differences in the way that participants consumed appropriately during the transition to motherhood. The second theme (section 5.3) considers how participants were seeking to 'find a balance' as they reincorporated motherhood into their gender identities. This theme suggests that women were negotiating a more egalitarian approach to domestic and caring responsibilities. The third theme (section 5.4) considers how participants viewed motherhood as an opportunity to reflexively socialise their children with the 'best of both worlds'. Throughout this chapter, mothering and consumption practices are presented as key sites for negotiating new gender identities and pushing the boundaries of gender norms. The chapter also highlights how participants were reflexively drawing on their gender socialisation and journeys to motherhood (presented in Chapter 4) to incorporate motherhood into their gender identities.

### **5.2 Consuming appropriately during the transition to motherhood**

This theme suggests that consuming appropriately played an important role as participants negotiated new gender identities as 'good' mothers. However, there were two ways in which participants' accounts of consuming appropriately differed from that shown in existing consumer research. Such research, usually based mainly on white middle-class mothers, has found that women are typically expected to demonstrate they are 'ready' for their baby's arrival. Being 'ready' means purchasing everything they need before the baby arrives (Miller

2014; Prothero 2002; see section 2.3). Studies (c.f. Kehily 2014; Miller 2007; 2005) have also found that women are expected to consume expert advice to protect their baby, and modify their consumption practices accordingly, to become experts on their own child. However, section 5.2.1 considers how South Asian cultural practices surrounding birth often mediated the market's role in participants' consumption of baby products during pregnancy. Section 5.2.2 examines how participants found becoming experts on their own child was made more complex due to competing forms of expert advice. Participants' performances of 'good' mothering practices were often shaped by participants' position within extended family hierarchies. As they sought to consume appropriately during the transition to motherhood, the norms of intensive mothering were both challenged and reproduced in complex ways.

### **5.2.1 Cultural practices in the transition to motherhood: mediating the market's role**

This section suggests that consuming baby products (e.g. prams, cots, toys, clothing and other nursery items etc.) played a somewhat different role in participants' transition to motherhood, compared to that shown in studies that focus mainly on white, middle-class mothers. Consumer research on the transition to motherhood suggests that purchasing appropriate baby products before the baby arrives is a key way in which white, middle-class women typically begin to negotiate their gender identity as mothers (c.f. Afflerback et al. 2014; see section 2.2.1). In contrast, women in this study tended to offer a rather different account of their purchases of baby products in preparation for motherhood.

The timing of participants' consumption of baby products marks a key difference in participants' consumption practices. Many women reported purchasing most of their baby products, including prams, after the birth of their child. Demonstrating that they were

appropriately prepared for motherhood (Miller 2014) was notably absent from participants' accounts. In contrast to Afflerback et al.'s (2014:2) study, most participants were not 'nesting', by expressing a need to be ready, with everything set up for them and their babies before birth. Instead, participants largely deferred most purchases until they had a better idea of what they required. As Mahira explains: 'after the delivery, I can buy, like, a pram and stuff like that, and whatever I need'. As Shaheera explains:

You can go out and buy after you've had it [the baby], so I don't think we even bought things, you know, in terms of the big items until afterwards, you know. (Shaheera)

Similarly Raveena chose to embark on her 'proper shop' for matching baby products, clothes, toys, and even a pram, several months after birth. In contrast to their white, middle-class counterparts, these women did not feel the need to consume during pregnancy to embrace their role as mothers. None of the women expressed a need to buy items to avoid being seen as bad or underprepared mothers. While participants often needed to purchase some items beforehand, such as a car seat, or a Moses basket and bedding, they viewed them in rather mundane, practical terms. For example, Raveena referred to these items as 'all the boring stuff', while Zahara made sure she had 'just the basics'. As such, these women seemed somewhat less vulnerable to the market's vast array of baby products than the mainly white middle-class women in the Voice Group's (2010a) study. Consuming appropriately by purchasing items before birth was not 'a proxy measure of good motherhood, as it is for white, middle- and working-class mothers (Miller 2014:166; Ponsford 2011)

Pram consumption, in particular, was a significant way in which participants' consumption practices differed. Consumer research has found that women perform their identities as good mothers during pregnancy through buying the 'right pram' (Thomsen and Sorensen

2006:920). Many women in this study recognised that prams were an ‘expensive consumption item’, as Thomsen and Sorensen (2006:920) also found. Yet, in contrast, they did not purchase their prams until several weeks or even months after birth. In many cases, participants did not go to extensive efforts to buy the ‘right pram’, as Thomsen and Sorensen (2006:920) suggest. For example, Aameena expressed that she ‘wasn’t particular about any brand’ of pram, indeed her pram was bought for her. Similarly, Zahara’s decision-making process did not involve much research or involvement: ‘[my sister-in-law] sent me a picture and I liked it so...she got it [for me]’.

Even when participants suggested that they embarked on more extensive searches, their pram choice was driven by practicalities rather than symbolic meanings:

I saw a really good pram with £50 off it... it was just ridiculously cheap.

I thought, you know what, it’ll do the job and I still use it now for my little one, it’s alright. (Shaheera)

Shaheera’s account of purchasing her pram is rather different from the women in Thomsen and Sorensen’s (2006:918) study, who found the purchase gave them a ‘strong emotional foundation’ for ‘becoming good mothers’. Unlike the women in Thomson and Sorensen’s (2006:918) study, Raveena did not gain much ‘pleasure of anticipation’ in the process of purchasing her pram:

...we’ve got the sturdiest, bestest [sic] – hopefully – the things that will last because, you know, everything will be out of warranty by then. So you want things that will last for the next baby and you don’t have to do this all over again (Raveena)

To explain their reasons for delaying their baby product purchases, women tended to refer to South Asian cultural practices surrounding birth. These cultural practices were usually inter-related and included: remaining indoors after birth for several weeks, staying at their mother's house after birth, and gift-giving. Nabeela explains:

Traditionally what happens when you have a kid in most Asian households is you go to your mum's house... you go to your mum's house so that your mum can basically tell you to put your feet up and look after you... So generally in those 40 days [after birth] you'll not see many Asian women venture out, even, you know, just shopping trips or anything like that, you get them done for you. (Nabeela)

Most women in this study adhered to these norms. In cases where participants did not go to stay with their mothers, they usually lived in close proximity to their parents, and tended to receive daily support from their mothers and other female family members. For many women, these cultural practices were intertwined with being a good mother. For example, Jasvinder felt that she would be viewed as a bad mother and 'would have been told off' if she had ventured outside with her baby too soon. She also 'admits' that she finds herself judging other (white) mothers by this norm:

We were in Toys R Us a couple of weeks back, and there was a couple who, [the mother] looked like she'd just come out of hospital, I'm not joking...And, you know, sort of, it was strange...it was cold that day, it wasn't very warm, and the baby wasn't wearing a hat...it kind of made us jump, because it's not something we're kind of used to seeing, and we, I would get a smack around the wrist, you know, from my mum saying, you know, why are you taking her out so early. (Jasvinder)

Most participants followed and welcomed these cultural practices. Not only were these women prioritising their babies' health and development, but they reflected that these practices were part of their support network within their family hierarchies. For example, Madina described this time as 'a chill out period' when 'you don't have to cook, you don't have to clean, you just look after your baby'. Jameela felt that 'things that we needed for going out' (e.g. prams) were unnecessary items that could be purchased later.

Interlinked with the expectation to stay indoors with family support, many participants described being inundated with visitors who bought expensive gifts for the new baby. As Ashira explains, once the baby arrived 'everyone showed up' with 'balloons, gift baskets, there was party outfits for her, and presents for me, cash ...everything was set up and it was perfect'. Often participants were gifted large items such as prams, cots and nursery furniture from family members and close friends. Zahara's response was typical: 'we didn't really have to buy everything because we got mostly everything as a present'. Gift giving was also often linked to family gatherings to celebrate the birth, such as baby showers, or specific religious and cultural practices (e.g. naming ceremonies). As Aameena explains, 'because we don't wanna go out, and people were gifting stuff as well, I had everything I needed'. The expectation to stay indoors with family support, combined with cultural expectations of extensive gift-giving meant that many participants did not feel the need to demonstrate that they were fully prepared before birth.

Another important aspect of consuming appropriately during the transition to motherhood is the consumption of expert advice (see section 2.3.3). For women in this study, learning how to negotiate competing forms of expert advice played an important and heightened role in participants' transition to motherhood.

## **5.2.2 Becoming an expert on your own child within South Asian family hierarchies**

Most participants tended to devote significant efforts to becoming experts on their own child, much like many mothers (Hays 1996; Miller 2005; 2014; see section 2.3.3). However, becoming an expert on your own child was heightened for participants in two key ways. Section 5.2.2.1 considers how negotiating competing forms of expert advice was a more complex process for women in this study. Section 5.2.2.2 suggests that participants' ability to do so was often shaped by their position within their family hierarchies.

### **5.2.2.1 Consuming appropriate forms of expert advice**

Consuming expert advice was an integral part of participants' transition to motherhood. Women in this study were negotiating between two competing forms of expert advice: formal or medical expert advice and traditional South Asian advice from elder female generations. Negotiating between formal and lay advice is a common feature of motherhood (Thomson et al. 2008; Miller 2014; see section 2.3). However the process was more complex for participants, as advice from female members of the family hierarchy traditionally holds a higher, expert status in South Asian cultures (Mumtaz and Salway 2007).

Participants consumed formal expert advice including medical advice from midwives, GPs, health visitors, NHS websites and leaflets, much like many mothers (Kehily 2014; Miller 2007). Other forms of expert advice included baby/parenting manuals, magazines, websites and apps (e.g. Mumsnet, Babycentre, Emma's Diary, Wonder Weeks, What to Expect). Like their white British counterparts, participants saw themselves as responsible for their babies' development. Women in this study were consuming these types of formal expert advice in order to ensure that they were minimising the risks and keeping their baby safe:

I actually looked forward to it. I was counting down the weeks, but I found it really... it was all really interesting... I think you take more notice of the baby being... the development and how your body's changing and what's happening to the baby, things I can do, things I can't do. (Anita)

Books, websites, and apps that tracked pregnancy and baby development were quick and simple ways for these women to gain a sense of what was normal at certain developmental stages. Although such advice enabled participants to track their baby development before and after birth, Anita also recognised a responsibility to monitor 'things' she can or can't do, like 'going for a run'. Tracking baby's development is reproduced as part of participants' gender identity as good mothers. For instance, Anita 'looked forward' to seeing what was happening when, while Jasvinder felt that understanding her baby's developmental stages meant she could understand her baby's needs more fully. These development trackers helped participants to develop a relationship with their baby, but they also reproduced the norms of intensive motherhood, supporting the findings of recent research (Kehily 2014).

However, many women often reflected on how this array of expert advice differed considerably from their own mothers' experiences. In South Asian cultures, expert advice on pregnancy and birth traditionally comes from elder female generations (Miller 1995; Mumtaz and Salway 2007; Wells and Dietsch 2014). Elder female relatives traditionally provide expert advice relating to mothers' diet, conduct, birthing practices and how to care for new-borns (Wells and Dietsch 2014). Such expert advice remains highly influential, despite the increasing authority of formal, medical expert advice (Miller 1995; Mumtaz and Salway 2007; Wells and Dietsch 2014).

Women often sensed that their mothers sometimes did not understand the need for extensive, formal advice, as Ashira suggests: 'my mum found really strange that I was reading books



about pregnancy'. Participants typically reflected that there was a significant gap between their mother's experiences and their own. Naeema explains:

I think my mum came from, I think... you know, I think her upbringing was probably different to mine, and it sort of, maybe, you know, she grew up in a village in Pakistan. And although, you know, obviously they all get through births and stuff absolutely fine, but I think when you're brought up in a different culture, different environment, you know, maybe some of that, those signs, or some of the rationale clashes. (Naeema)

Many participants felt frustrated that they could not draw on their own mothers' advice, which they perceived as less relevant to their cultural context. For example, Naeema felt that her mother's advice revealed 'clashes' or differences in their approaches to motherhood. Naeema 'wouldn't necessarily have agreed with' the types of 'things that [my mum] may have been told to do', like refraining from certain activities or eating traditional foods. She found these 'clashes' rather difficult, as she would normally 'go to your mum for everything', but found her mother's advice was 'out of date'.

Yet participants' mothers' advice was intertwined with the body of traditional expert advice from within gendered family hierarchies. Anita found that once she became pregnant, she was bombarded with a range of 'dos and don'ts' from elder female family members. Anita was typical in regarding her mother and mother-in-law as 'the experts'; she felt 'should be learning from them'. However, she also resented the way in which she was frequently judged on her consumption behaviours: 'don't be eating this, and don't do this, and don't sit like this'.

Family hierarchies often intensified participants' feelings of being ultimately responsible for their child's development. Parminder explains: 'if the child starts suffering with gas, it's always blamed on the mother...you're not eating right, you need to eat right'. Participants often viewed elder female advice as 'authoritative' and linked with 'matriarchal' family hierarchies, as Anita reflects:

...so it's mum and everyone, or mainly all the women. So, my husband's aunties, and grandma, and his mum, and my mum, and everybody really...it's more it's pressed on you, because when you're pregnant, especially in my community, you're everybody's property or everyone's got something to tell you. (Anita)

This excerpt captures how the ideals of intensive motherhood were operating as part of the gendered family hierarchy. Participants' position within family hierarchies often led these women to feel frustrated and overwhelmed by the competing sources of expert advice. For example, Parminder reflects that she 'used to get mad at the fact that I was getting contradictory advice'.

Food consumption was one of the key areas in which participants often found conflicts between different forms of advice. Participants were typically aware of formal medical expert advice in which expectant and new mothers are expected to modify their food consumption (see section 2.2.3). For example, Hashini felt she 'had to avoid certain things' like tuna, nuts and caffeine and 'tried to eat healthily' by cutting down on sugary foods, eating more fruit and vegetables and taking vitamin and folic acid supplements. She felt strongly that she needed to modify her consumption behaviours to ensure their child's development: 'I wanted to check everything and see whether it was safe for the baby'. Participants were usually keen to minimise risks to their babies, much like the women in

Lupton's (2011) study, by conducting more detailed product searches and changing their consumption habits. As Hashini explains:

I have to get the same type of vitamins from vegetables so that has changed and anything that has preservatives in it I have completely avoided after finding out and we always check when we buy about juice. Especially juices and if you even take, whenever you eat out we check what it is and fizzy drinks, everything I've completely stopped consuming. (Hashini)

These women were reproducing the norms of intensive mothering by 'deferring to medical and child-rearing experts' to ensure their child's development and minimise risks to their babies, like many mothers (Hays 1996; MacKendrick 2014:5).

However, participants were often also subject to South Asian expert advice regarding what they should and should not consume. Anita's response is typical: 'traditionally, there are loads of changes you make when you're pregnant, diet's a big thing'. In South Asian cultures, mothers are advised to consume certain foods at certain times during pregnancy and after birth. Although specific advice varies on family and region, foods are generally classified as 'hot' or 'cold' (Wells and Dietsch 2014:e4). Hot and cold in this instance does not necessarily refer to temperature or spice levels (Choudhry 1997). Rather, foods that are high in protein, acid or salt are considered 'hot', whereas sweet foods, vegetables and fruit are considered 'cold' (Wells and Dietsch 2014:e4). Since pregnancy is considered a 'hot' state, mothers should avoid hot foods to avoid the risk of miscarriage, until the later stages when hot foods are thought to help with the birth (ibid.).

Participants were frequently trying to adhere to traditional advice regarding hot and cold foods. As Rafeeqa explains: 'my mum, obviously, put me on a strict diet', telling her to 'eat

this, eat that' throughout pregnancy. Traditional expert advice was therefore intensifying the responsibility for mothers to modify their food consumption to ensure the baby's safe development. Parminder's experience illustrates the intense pressure that is implicit within traditional expert advice: 'there's always a lot of restrictions on the mother'. Anita could perceive conflicts in sources of expert advice:

...there's a belief that if you have fat with hot food, you could have... you could lose the baby because it's making you hot for some reason, and that's...because it was at the back of my mind thinking, it's not scientific, but what if something happens because I'm doing what I've been told not to do. So, there's always that lingering doubt because the seed's been planted. (Anita)

This excerpt captures how Anita was struggling to balance traditional and 'scientific' forms of expert advice, both of which reproduce norms of intensive motherhood. Similarly, Parminder felt that 'there was a lot of fight between me and my mother, between the old and the new', as her mother's advice often conflicted with what her doctor advised. Participants were often torn between following traditional advice to eat hot foods, especially nuts, towards the end of their pregnancy, which conflicted with advice from their midwives.

Conflicting advice also often continued after birth, as participants learned how to care for their babies. Consumption surrounding infant feeding, weaning and baby's sleeping patterns were key areas of conflicting advice for many participants. For instance, Chanda described how her mother put intense pressure on Chanda to breastfeed, which was proving difficult due to medical complications. Chanda recalls her mother telling her to 'try this and try that', giving her 'all this random stuff', and insisting on going to see the health visitor with her to 'see what advice is being given'. Her mother even 'blamed' Chanda for the baby needing

medical treatment: ‘she was like, it’s your fault that she’s in that [medical apparatus]. And she wasn’t happy about it’. Similarly, Nabeela was overwhelmed and frustrated by conflicting advice regarding where their baby should sleep, while Anita encountered conflicts about when to introduce solid foods. These women’s close female family members (e.g. mothers, mothers-in-law, aunts) were often trying to assert their expert advice as more authoritative than formal, medical advice. Participants were negotiating competing forms of advice in a way that is even more complex than studies of mainly white mothers have found (Hays 1996, Miller 2007).

However, women typically found that regardless of all the different forms of advice, none could fully prepare them for the lived experience of becoming a mother, supporting existing research (Miller 2005; 2007; Thomson et al. 2008). As Chanda explains:

I went to all the... I managed to get all the right advice and speaking to everybody and... again, I read up about things and I bought that book, ‘What to Expect in the First Year’, so I’d like read, you know, look at the index and try and find solutions to the problems that I was having. But it’s not textbook stuff, is it? (Chanda)

Similarly, Jasvinder likened early motherhood to a ‘rollercoaster’, while Raveena saw it as a ‘trial and error’ process. These women encountered a gap between forms of expert advice and their lived experiences of early motherhood. In the sense that no form of advice could fully prepare them for motherhood, these women’s experiences were similar to that shown in studies of mainly white, middle-class mothers (Miller 2005; 2007; Voice Group 2010b). Yet participants gradually learned to view themselves as experts on their own child by developing several strategies to negotiate their identity as good mothers, as the following sections (5.2.2.2-5.2.2.4) discuss.

### **5.2.2.2 Questioning and developing a blend of expert advice**

One of the key ways in which white, middle-class mothers negotiate their identity as experts on their own child is through learning to ‘challenge and discard’ aspects of formal expert advice (Miller 2007:355). However, for women in this study, the process is more complex because of the competing forms of expert advice discussed above (section 5.2.2.1). Miller (2007) suggests that women tend to become more critical of formal expert advice, in favour of advice from other mothers and their own experiences. The women in this study also learned to question expert advice, but the advice of ‘other mothers’ from within the family hierarchy was also seen as a form of expert advice. Such advice seemed to hold a higher status than suggested in studies of predominantly white mothers (Hays 1996; Miller 2007). Yet in many cases participants were questioning elements of both forms of expert advice. Chanda explains:

...if my mum came up with something then I would Google it on the internet, or I would try to find something to substantiate what she was saying. But I wouldn't just take it at face value, sort of thing, no... I just challenge what she says, sort of thing. Yes, unless, like, sometimes, it may be a valid point, but she doesn't back up well. (Chanda)

This excerpt captures how participants were not necessarily moving away from formal medical advice in favour of (expert) advice based on other mothers’ experiences, as Miller (2005; 2007) suggests. Participants would often appeal to formal medical advice to resist or justify their actions, especially when they conflicted with traditional expert advice from female family members:

...the medical side of things, they just tell you to be normal, and to walk normally and to do things normally. Families there's things like oh my God, they treat you like you're an invalid. Better sit down. Don't pick anything up... well I was like I'm absolutely fine... So anyone could say what they want, and I'd just have an argument (Ashira)

However, women also sometimes resisted formal expert advice in favour of traditional expert advice. For example, participants often found that traditional expert advice was contradictory to the advice from their midwives. Rafeeqa's mother advised her to swaddle her babies to help settle them. Her mother encouraged her to subvert the formal expert advice: 'my mum was, like, un-swaddle them when the health visitor comes. Just unwrap it'. Similarly, women like Shaheera and Madina experimented with traditional remedies such as honey water, despite health visitors' warnings about the dangers of honey for young babies.

For women in this study, becoming an expert on their own child typically meant being reflexive about competing forms of advice, developing their own blend that worked for them. Women like Chanda, who were well-educated and confident at researching (usually on the internet) were better able to question advice. Rather than relying on books and websites all the time, Nabeela 'stopped reading everything' until she needed specific help. Nabeela also began to accept that she could not adhere to all the traditional expert advice that was 'imposed' on her. She focussed on advice that 'suggested solutions' and discarded less relevant advice: 'you just, kind of, listen to it and nod your head and let it go out the other ear'. Similarly, Anita learned to 'not be too rigid', but to 'be flexible' in order to become an expert on her own child.

### **5.2.2.3 Demonstrating their child's development**

As well as questioning advice, participants typically became adept at demonstrating that they were ensuring their child's development, much like the women in Budds et al.'s (2017) study. Women learned to justify their mothering practices, especially when feeling judged by others. Several participants encountered problems with breastfeeding, and felt that they were being judged by other female family members. These women often referred to their child's development to demonstrate that they knew what was best for their child. Ashira explains:

...you kind of get over that, because when you go for her monthly check-ups and stuff right, she's going fine, she's achieving everything she needs to achieve. And she was quick too, I mean she...I'm not joking, she was laughing, you know smiling at a week old. (Ashira)

Similarly, once Anita was more confident that her daughter was developing well, she felt more able to question and discard advice as she saw fit. She explains: 'I just thought she's smart enough, I'm happy with that'.

Participants also referred to everyday activities like playing with toys, reading or going to the park as opportunities to demonstrate their child's development. For example, Jasvinder went to great effort to make sure they bought 'the right toys...everything's handpicked to the point where I know it's going to help her'. These women usually took their children to activity groups, structured playtime with their children, and monitored their food intake. These were key ways to demonstrate their child's development. As Jasvinder explains: 'I want to be tuned in to what she's taking in...and be happy with her progress'. Structuring their child's learning and monitoring their progress was a key way in which participants



could demonstrate that they were doing the best for their child, supporting the findings of recent studies (Budds et al. 2017; Wall 2011; 2013).

Although participants were becoming reflexive about competing forms of expert advice, they continued to devote substantial resources and intense efforts to demonstrate their child's development. Becoming an expert on their own child meant that many participants were reproducing the norms of intensive motherhood, much like studies of mainly white, middle-class mothers have found (Budds et al. 2017; Wall 2010).

#### **5.2.2.4 Forming a support network**

Forming a support network was also a key way that participants became experts on their own child. Existing research has suggested that support networks are an important part of becoming an expert on your own child, through engendering a shift from formal expert advice to practical advice based on experiences (Miller 2005). For women in this study, however, support networks seemed to offer more than a means to question formal expert advice. For many participants, support networks offered women the opportunity to share information and offer advice to others. For example, in Raveena's support network 'there's lots of sharing, you know, this is on cheap at this place, nappies are on sale here, KiddiCare just closed down'.

Support networks also offered participants emotional support, through encouragement and empathy, as they did for the women in Drentea and Moran-Cross' (2005) study. Anita used her support networks to receive and offer advice, based on her own experiences: 'we had a little babies group...it was nice...oh has yours got teeth yet, or we've got this now, or mine do that too'. As Fatima explains: 'we sort of compare notes and try and encourage each other on how to bring them up'. Support networks were also a means of instrumental support, by

giving participants a chance to gain a sense of ‘what is normal’ and share tips and techniques (ibid.). In providing participants with both emotional support and information, support networks could be seen as key source of social capital (ibid.). Such social capital played an important part in enabling women in this study to become experts on their own child.

A key way in which participants formed and maintained support networks was through mobile phones and free messaging apps such as Whatsapp, Instagram and Facebook messaging. These apps are free and allow users to send each other messages, photos and web-links. Users can also form their own groups which allow conversations among group members to develop, with messages instantly sent to all members of the group, for free. Many women in this study used messaging apps as a key way of developing and maintaining a support network, especially during the first few months when they were expected to remain mostly indoors.

Messaging services like Whatsapp were a quick, cheap and easy way to communicate with their support groups, which may include groups of siblings, especially sisters, but also in-laws, friends and other mothers that they meet at formal events such as baby classes. Participants often had several different groups, for example a group of siblings (especially sisters), in-laws, and sometimes groups of other mothers they knew (e.g. from playgroups or friends from work). Messaging offered participants the opportunity to communicate quickly and at any time, day or night, as Anita explains: ‘I can pick it up, read, put it down and reply later’. Texting at all hours of the day as part of a ‘midnight group’ was part of the camaraderie of early motherhood:

...so we’re all doing 4am mornings, so we had a little babies group, but sometimes we wouldn’t all be up at the same time but we would read it at strange hours or reply at strange hours. So, it was nice. (Anita)

Although women did sometimes attend sessions for babies such as support groups, toddler groups and classes, messaging was generally regarded as the main way to stay in contact. Attending classes with their babies required effort and came with the risk of their baby not behaving well, which tended to be a worry for most participants in the early stages of motherhood. Support networks were a means of sharing experiences in a less judgemental environment. Participants preferred to use their informal support networks to get together with other mothers rather than attend formal classes, as Zahara explains: 'if anything's going on, any events, shopping trips, meals, someone's just put it up, send it, type it'. For Anita, these get-togethers were more 'natural' than baby classes which made her feel like 'I was the only Asian woman'. Anita also felt she encountered a 'middle-class effect' at formal classes which prevented her from saying 'this is really hard, I don't know what I'm doing, and you're not allowed to say that'. For Ameena, messaging apps and groups, on the other hand, were a safe, supportive space to share 'our moans and groans about how hard it is' with other mothers, sisters and friends. Participants who could mobilise their social capital to develop support networks seemed better positioned to become experts on their own child. Using apps like Whatsapp to develop support networks was an important way in which participants negotiated their new gender identities as good mothers.

This theme has considered how participants sought to become good mothers by consuming appropriately during the transition to motherhood. The following theme focuses on how participants negotiated new gender identities as both good mothers and independent women through everyday mothering and consumption practices.

### **5.3 Reincorporating motherhood into gender identity: being a good mother and an ‘independent woman’**

As discussed in Chapter 4, participants’ journeys to motherhood were shaped by family hierarchies, and typically involved negotiating access to higher education, marriage and starting a family. In particular, section 4.4.3 outlined how participants often regarded motherhood as a ‘spanner in the works’. This theme focuses on how participants were making significant efforts to make sense of their gender identities as both good mothers and independent women. Participants typically reflected on their gender socialisation and negotiation of their gender identities as independent women. Section 5.3.1 examines how such reflexivity often helped women to ‘find a balance’ between being an independent woman and a good mother. Section 5.3.2 examines how participants tended to ‘find a balance’ by negotiating a more egalitarian division of domestic and caring responsibilities.

Throughout this theme participants were negotiating their gender identities in ways that both challenged and reproduced the norms of intensive mothering. Participants’ ability to do so was often shaped by their position within South Asian family hierarchies. Consumption practices surrounding parenting, housework, food and childcare were key sites for reproducing and challenging gender norms.

#### **5.3.1 ‘Finding a balance’**

Although participants who felt more in control of the timing of motherhood seemed to find motherhood as less of a ‘spanner in the works’ (see section 4.4.3), women across the sample were negotiating the norms of intensive motherhood. In line with existing research (Boyd 2002:463, Hays 1996), many were struggling with the expectation of ‘being there’ for their children, which is a key part of intensive mothering (see section 2.3.3). As Zahara explains, being a ‘good mum’ means ‘basically being around your child in every way, supporting

them, looking after them'. Safiya was constantly striving to ensure her children's development, as she felt strongly that the time spent should be 'proper time' that will benefit her children in some way. However, many participants often found motherhood to be very draining, and much less rewarding or fulfilling than they had thought it would be, as expressed by Anita:

...everybody says your child comes first, and I think I struggled with a lot of that because I would put her first and then I would get really exhausted, tired, not showered for days and then feel really rubbish about myself.  
(Anita)

In this excerpt, Anita was starting to question whether she can constantly put her child first, to the detriment of her own well-being. Similarly, Naeema struggled to reconcile 'this belief that I was the only person to be able to do things best for [daughter]' with her feeling that 'not being at work just wasn't so stimulating for me at all'.

For the majority of participants, returning to work was both a financial necessity and a key part of their identity. For Parminder, 'my work... is a part of me, and also financially I think I needed to get back to work'. Similarly, Anita explains how 'financially, I had to do it, but also for the first six months I missed it like anything'. Fatima was one of many participants who felt that becoming a stay-at-home mother was 'not an option'. For these women work was their means of independence, as Fatima explains: 'I'm just all independent now... I want to know I've got my own income coming in'. Most participants therefore typically planned to return to work or study after their maternity leave, or were planning to look for work in the near future.

As participants reflected on their return to work, many women found that incorporating motherhood into their gender identity meant justifying how they could ensure their child's development. Some felt guilty about not 'being there' all the time, as other research on motherhood has suggested (Boyd 2002:463; Lupton 2011). As Parminder explains: 'I feel guilty about the fact that, you know, the whole day she's at day care and school...the only time I give her is that half an hour in the night when I read to her'. In order to become good mothers, participants typically framed their decision as the best for both the baby and themselves. As Anita explains, working was a way to 'keep my sanity' or 'use my brain'. She felt she 'needed to work' in order to become a better mother: 'it's good for the both of us'. These women were reflexively aware that work was a key part of their gender identity as independent women. This reflexivity enabled them to negotiate the norms of intensive mothering, by positioning their decision to work as the best way to meet their child's needs. As Anita reflects, returning to work enabled her to 'be the best mum I can be'.

Typically, participants referred to a process of 'finding a balance' as a means of negotiating their identities as both good mothers and independent women. Participants had to learn to manage their feelings of guilt about returning to work. For Nabeela, 'finding a balance' meant learning to be 'flexible' and to 'compromise'. As Anita explains, 'finding a balance' is an ongoing, reflexive process:

I can be flexible about this, and then I can put her first here, but then sometimes I can't put her first because I have to get to work...I said to my mum, I'm not a housewife. I'm not a housewife, mum. As I'm washing the dishes, I'm not a housewife. I hate this, and then I keep fighting until I just give in. The house needs cleaning. I'd rather be adventuring or something. (Anita)

Here, Anita wanted to ‘keep fighting’ to push against the gender norms of intensive motherhood, which were reproduced within her family hierarchy. She was reflecting on how she and her mother had suffered as part of an oppressive family hierarchy (see section 4.2), and how she had fought for her independence following her divorce (see section 4.4.3). Although she was pushing against traditional gender norms, the process was a struggle for her. However, this excerpt also captures how gender identities are constantly reiterated, as Butler (1990) purports. For many participants, it is these ongoing reflections and negotiations that are a source of transformation and change.

Indeed, many participants often reflected on the intense pressures that they and their mothers had faced as part of gendered family hierarchies (see section 4.2). They reflected that their mothers were not able to challenge traditional gender norms within their family hierarchies. Their mothers had often experienced the ‘double burden’ of managing work, household and parenting responsibilities, supporting the findings of research on gender and immigrant families (Dion and Dion 2001:512). These women were reflecting on how their mothers had to sacrifice their education and career to get married and migrate to the UK, which made it difficult for their mothers to challenge gender norms. For example, Raveena reflected that her mother had to ‘carry both roles’ and was not able to push against these norms. Similarly, Nabeela felt that her mother had little choice but to submit to the ‘Asian mentality’ in which women remain responsible for caring and domestic work. Yet some participants felt their mothers were also constrained by their husbands’ traditional views of gender norms. As Nabeela reflects: ‘I can imagine my mum being really different if she’d married somebody else ... things could have been very different for her’.

Such reflexivity enabled participants to differentiate themselves from their mothers, who had little success in challenging the gender norms within their family hierarchies. For example,

Namra reflects: ‘my mum didn’t really have much of a clue’ about how ‘things could be different’. She felt that her mother ‘just muddled along, I think she just accepted it, this is the life she sort of came into’. Having become independent women, through negotiating education, work and marriage, participants often felt able to reflect on how they could negotiate change. Earlier in this section, we saw how Anita sought to differentiate herself from her mother as she insisted: ‘I’m not a housewife’. She views herself as different to her mother, because she is constantly fighting to pursue her independence:

I just want to keep growing... and that’s what I do, I want to just keep growing, and that’s what I do. It’s what I enjoy. It’s me. (Anita)

For most women in this study, ‘finding a balance’ meant seeking to push the boundaries of gender norms, by negotiating the distribution of caring and domestic responsibilities within family hierarchies, as discussed in section 5.3.2.

### **5.3.2 Negotiating domestic and caring responsibilities within family hierarchies**

Many participants were developing strategies to negotiate a more egalitarian distribution of household and caring responsibilities. There were two key areas in which participants were negotiating caring and domestic responsibilities. The main source of negotiation was with their husbands, which is examined in section 5.3.2.1. However, participants were also negotiating domestic and caring responsibilities within family hierarchies, most notably with their mothers and mothers-in-law. Section 5.3.2.2 considers how women often negotiated complex blends of care between extended family support networks and outsourcing to the childcare market (Epp and Velagaleti 2014).



### **5.3.2.1 Negotiating with husbands**

Typically, participants' negotiations with their husbands were significantly shaped by their husbands' views of gender norms. For many participants, a key part in negotiating their marriage involved finding a 'suitable husband' who shared their egalitarian view of gender norms (see section 4.4). Women who had negotiated access to higher education and pursued a career were usually better positioned to negotiate their marriage to husbands with such a 'shared mentality'. For example, Parminder regarded her husband as 'generally not traditional' in his view of gender norms, as he does not feel that 'the woman has to do all the stuff'. Ashira felt that she and her husband are 'like-minded' in their view of gender norms, while Jameela explains: 'we share everything in life really. It's not just views – everything'. When they became mothers, these women found they were able to challenge traditional gender norms and push for a more egalitarian division of parenting and domestic responsibilities.

For these women, encouraging their husbands to play a more 'hands-on' role in parenting their children was a key way in which they were pushing for a more equitable division of parenting responsibilities. For instance, Mahira explains: 'when he comes home I end up handing [baby] over, I say look after him', and she often encouraged her husband to get 'involved' in the more laborious aspects parenting, like changing nappies, bathing and putting the baby to bed. Raveena's account is typical of the more shared approach that participants were negotiating: 'he'll take care of him if he needs it and if I'm busy, and I'll take care of him when I'm free and things'. Raveena contrasts her husband's involvement with other generations of South Asian men: 'the previous generations thought that well that's not really my area, you know what are you giving him to me for, I just play with him?'. Here, Raveena reflects that her husband's involvement is part of a push towards more

egalitarian gender norms. She and her husband are reflexively negotiating new gender identities as they negotiate more equitable parenting responsibilities. As they do so, they are also challenging and transforming gender norms.

Although having a 'shared mentality' regarding gender norms helped, women still had to negotiate the extent of their husband's involvement. Some participants had negotiated a mutual agreement with their husbands. As Jameela explains, 'it's like a job-share'. For Parminder, going back to work changed the dynamic in her negotiations with her husband:

[When you go back to work] it's okay, because then you plan it out differently. You're more liberal with these things as a husband and wife. You're planning, okay, now I have to work, now I have to do these things, get a steriliser, you organise your food; things get much better.

(Parminder)

Parminder encouraged her husband to 'listen to what I...what was required' so that they could work together to plan their daily routines: 'in the morning he gets [daughter] ready...that's the division of work'. Similarly, as Namra returned to work, she was able to negotiate more help from her husband: 'If I'm at home, he'll drop them at school, if he's at home, rather than expecting me to do it. It's not like are you dropping them off or am I dropping off.' These women describe their husbands as taking a more 'active' role in parenting and housework and tended to view the distribution of household and caring responsibilities as a 'shared'. They have negotiated a tacit understanding in which they can share responsibilities like cooking, bathing the children and cleaning. As Ameena explains: 'he knows, like, let's just do it...he wouldn't wait for me to tell him to do it.' Similarly, Jameela regards the division of labour as a 'shared', mutual understanding that 'if you're not around, I'll do it, and if you're around, you'll do it, kind of thing.'

However, others, like Rafeeqa, found that they had to be more forceful to negotiate more support from their husbands. She had to strongly encourage her husband to share the night-feeds:

I bloody make him. It's your one; can you get up now, please? ...And, you know, I think culturally there are some parents and some men, should I say, that would walk out of a room if there's a child's crying. And I find that so rude. And I hate it. And I hate stories like that. And I said, you bloody better had or I'll knock you for six. (Rafeeqa)

These women had to be much more explicit in their negotiations with their husbands. They could not simply entrust their husbands to bath the children, sterilise the bottles, or wash up. As Rafeeqa explains: 'if I need to go out or something and I'll, and I'll leave a list, like, this one needs to have his nappy changed, this one needs to eat.'

They often found their husbands resisted doing certain tasks, for example Zahara's husband 'hates doing dirty nappies'. However, these women, including Zahara, continued to push their husbands to become more 'hands-on'. She insisted that her husband learned to do more: 'I was like, you have to do it'. Similarly, when Rafeeqa's husband tried to resist by asking her to 'do [her nappy] before you go out', she would refuse: 'I was, like, no, you will do it when I'm gone.' Although these women had to be more explicit with their husbands, these participants were better positioned to negotiate the division of domestic and caring responsibilities than participants whose husbands held more traditional views.

When husbands held traditional views of gender norms, participants found the process of negotiating parenting, childcare and household duties more difficult. These findings are similar to that shown in research (Bianchi et al. 2000) on American households in which

men hold traditional views of gender norms. Similar to Bianchi et al.'s (2000) findings, these women tended to reflect on their husbands' gender socialisation with traditional gender norms. For example, Anita complains that her husband's father 'does nothing' and is 'waited on' by his wife, while Fatima refers to her husband as a 'lazy sod', for which she 'blame[s] his mum'.

However, Anita's case exemplifies how these women were nevertheless developing ways to challenge the domestic division of labour. Anita described her husband as playing a 'very...passive' role in terms of parenting and housework during her maternity leave. She reflected that 'he prefers me to tell him things. He needs direction in what needs doing' and often found it frustrating that he would not help her out more. Anita was also struggling with the norms of intensive motherhood: 'in my culture there's more emphasis for the mother to do it'. As a result, Anita reproduced the norms of intensive motherhood, as she 'tried to do everything', in which being a good mother also involved ensuring the house was 'spotless all the time'. After several months back at work, Anita became more reflexive: 'working full-time and doing everything else is just virtually impossible'. She began to push against the norms of intensive motherhood, by accepting that she could be a good mother, yet share some parenting responsibilities with her husband.

Yet for these participants, encouraging their husbands to share some of the parenting and domestic responsibilities was often a difficult process. Learning to communicate with their husbands was a major factor:

...that was a big thing, the communication. Because I wasn't telling him what needed doing, and I was just getting really upset that he wasn't doing it. And then it'd come up every now and then, and he'd have no idea, and I'd think, how can you not know? How can you not know? It's so

obvious... he used to say why don't I just tell him? And I'd say, I don't want to be ordering you about you know. So do it because you want to do it, or you see that I need things, but... so that has been a big thing for me, to learn to have to tell. (Anita)

Anita had to learn to communicate with her husband, in 'a gradual, incremental process'. This process involved 'giving him instructions', such as: 'drop her off at your mum's', 'can you just get that in the oven', 'sending him to the butchers'. Similarly, Asma managed to persuade her husband to 'help out at the night time', as she struggled to fit her studies around the children and housework. Anita found that if she combined these conversations with 'physically putting a stop' to doing everything herself, her husband learned to take a 'more of an active role'. Although Anita found these negotiations difficult, she has managed to push for a more equitable division of domestic and caring responsibilities:

... [My husband] drops her off to both grandma's, and he picks her up from both grandma's, so he's got a very big role in it. And he... if they need to cancel or have her taken earlier or dropped off later, then he does all of that managing...so he's the sort of main 'doer' during the day, and I sort of overall plan the week. He's got a lot better at being involved with her. Her food, her nappies, you know getting used to what she needs to wear, all of it, he's got a lot better. (Anita)

This excerpt captures how these women were challenging the division of household and caring responsibilities, pushing the boundaries of gender norms surrounding intensive motherhood. These women did seem to face more resistance from their husbands, which they linked to their husband's gender socialisation with traditional gender norms. However, they developed strategies including communicating better with their husband and sometimes

abandoning some domestic activities to prompt renegotiation. In doing so, participants like Anita, Asma and Fatima were negotiating new gender identities as they pursued a more egalitarian division of domestic and caring responsibilities.

#### **5.2.2.5 Negotiating within family hierarchies**

For many women, ‘finding a balance’ also meant negotiating domestic and caring responsibilities within family hierarchies. In most cases, family hierarchies played an important role in ‘finding a balance’, as participants negotiated childcare and developed support networks. The first part of this section considers participants’ negotiation of childcare and support networks within family hierarchies. However, ‘finding a balance’ was particularly intense for participants who were living with extended family members when they became mothers. These women’s negotiations are examined later in this section.

As a key part of ‘finding a balance’, participants were typically developing support networks and negotiating different blends of childcare, supporting the findings of recent research (Epp and Velagaleti 2014). Participants frequently referred to an expectation in South Asian cultures for mothers to rely on their maternal and/or paternal grandmothers for any childcare support, as other research on South Asian mothers has found (Bhopal 1998). As Ashira explains, ‘it’s expected that the grandmothers will do it’. A further implication of this norm is that childcare by female family members is preferable to external forms of childcare (e.g. nurseries, children’s centres and childminders). Participants often referred to an expectation for grandmothers to provide childcare for the first few years, when children are seen as more vulnerable. This expectation was regarded as a typical South Asian gender norm surrounding motherhood, as Nabeela explains: ‘it’s just Asian mentality of keeping them wrapped up in cotton wool until they’re old and grown up and can say things for themselves’. Here, Nabeela captures how the norms of intensive motherhood are intertwined with South Asian family

hierarchies. Keeping childcare within the family hierarchy seemed to be part of a mother's responsibility to ensure their child's development.

Yet most women in this study were not solely reliant on paternal or maternal grandmothers for childcare, and it was not uncommon for participants to resist offers of full-time childcare from their mothers and/or mothers-in-law. Instead, participants often preferred to negotiate a blend of childcare provision between family and external sources, including state-funded and paid nursery provision, mirroring the findings of recent research on childcare consumption (Epp and Velagaleti 2014; Huff and Cotte 2013). Nevertheless, participants usually had to justify their decision to outsource childcare beyond the family, as Nabeela explains:

I did have to fight with her father for her to have that experience [of nursery] because he was all, oh no she's far too young to go to nursery and she's far too young to do this and that - Asian mentality...his was more a case of family will look after her but unfortunately his parents, they're diabetics and, you know, his mum had issues with arthritis in her shoulder and stuff. And the house isn't very safe because everything is laminate and they don't have stair gates on and stuff like that, do you know what I mean? (Nabeela)

This excerpt captures how women like Nabeela were continuing to push against gender norms of intensive mothering that were strongly intertwined with South Asian family hierarchies. Nabeela is exercising her judgement as a good mother, and expert on her own child. She asserts a position of authority by judging her parents-in-law as unsuitable carers for her child, and deeming their house an unsafe environment. Paradoxically, the norms of

intensive motherhood are also part of participants' justifications for not relying solely on grandparents.

'Finding a balance' also meant managing a blend of childcare that would ensure their child's development. Participants often felt that formal childcare was performing a particular role in their child's development that often could not be provided solely by family childcare. As Naeema explains:

[My daughter] was never there [at nursery] fulltime, I think she was there two days a week. So it wasn't, you know, it was a good balance I think, you know, for her, yes...I think, you know, I felt that for children, for a child to be exposed to other children, you know, I think it was important to develop those sort of social skills. (Naeema)

Similarly, Chanda reflected that she needed 'to get her into nursery to interact with other kids otherwise she was just interacting with adults'. Parminder also regarded childcare from grandparents as somewhat limited: 'there's a certain amount they can give to children...your grandparents are old.' These women often framed their decision to outsource childcare to the market as a means of ensuring their child's development.

Yet family members often played an integral role in providing flexible wrap-around care, alongside formal childcare. Participants tended to develop a support network that enabled them to 'find a balance' between their gender identity as good mothers and independent women:

...we've always had to be independent and do things ourselves. So I think that's what's brought us closer as well as sisters because we've all looked out for each other as well... they've all got kids. It's give and take, isn't



it? So I help them when, in their situation and they'll help me when I'm stuck. (Ameena)

To some extent, many participants in this study could be seen as 'extensive mothers' (Christopher 2012:74), as they are managing or overseeing their child's development, rather than performing the traditional role of stay-at-home mothers. Yet, most participants devoted intense efforts to ensure their child's development. If extensive mothering means to 'reject the core beliefs of intensive motherhood' (Christopher 2012:93), this does not adequately capture participants' accounts of motherhood. Rather, women framed their decision to work as part of their gender identities as both independent women and good mothers. Participants were often both challenging and reproducing norms of intensive motherhood as they negotiated blends of childcare.

For women who lived with extended family (see Table 3.2), family hierarchies also played a highly influential role in negotiating domestic and childcare responsibilities. Several participants had lived with their husband's parents when they married, however most had moved out. The few who remained had managed to negotiate a shared view of gender norms with their extended families. Raveena had negotiated a 'mutual understanding' with her mother- and father-in-law in which they share cooking, cleaning and shopping between them. Similarly, Shaheera had a 'mutual agreement' with her mother-in-law, whereby Shaheera was responsible for the 'supermarket groceries' and her mother-in-law 'will do the Indian groceries'.

These women were able to negotiate an open and flexible relationship, where household responsibilities could be fitted in around the demands of parenting. As Shaheera explains, 'if my mother-in-law can see that, you know, I'm having my hands full with the little ones, then understandingly, she'll just get on with [the housework]'. Shaheera reflects that her

mother-in-law was more amenable to sharing domestic work evenly: 'I think [it's] because she's brought up children herself, she knows how hard it can be...to juggle things around'. Raveena felt that she and her mother-in-law were both keen to avoid 'repeating the cycle' in which 'the women in our family suffer'. These women were reflexively aware that they were challenging the traditional gender hierarchies, in which, daughters-in-law are typically expected to take on most of the domestic work (c.f. Bhopal 1997; 1998; see section 2.4). These participants found it easier to do so when they had a 'mutual understanding' of gender norms with their mothers-in-law. In Raveena's case, housework and caring responsibilities were also shared between the men in the household: 'my father-in-law does all the shopping...he loves doing it'.

In contrast, most participants who initially lived with their in-laws had since moved out. Often these women referred to differences in their views of gender norms, and found it more difficult to push for a shared division of housework and caring responsibilities. Namra reflects on living with her mother-in-law after the birth of her first child:

...my mother-in-law was just a bit over bearing for me. I wanted to do things my way and hold my own baby, sit with my own baby rather than coming down and she's sat there with the baby and I have to go in the kitchen and clean up. (Namra)

Her experience is closer to accounts of traditional family hierarchies (Bhopal 1998), in which paternal grandmothers occupy a more powerful position than daughters-in-law. Namra found it very difficult to challenge her mother-in-law, and struggled to cope with becoming a mother: 'I just found the whole thing really tiring. It was just another battle every time, I found it quite exhausting emotionally'.

Participants who encountered conflicting views on gender norms often pushed for a physical move out of the shared family home. As Nabeela explains: 'I kind of said to my husband we need to move out'. For these women, persuading their husbands that they should move out of the shared home was a key way of circumventing the family hierarchy. Motherhood seemed to provide a legitimate reason for participants to persuade their husbands to move out. In Nabeela's case, she convinced her husband by explaining her need to breastfeed on demand, which would mean locking herself in their bedroom, or looking 'indecent' in front of her in-laws. Namra took a different approach, encouraging her husband not only to move out of the shared family home, but also out of the 'predominantly Asian' area of town. She recalls how she wanted to 'live among professionals' as a means of improving her children's life chances: 'I felt we have to move to somewhere where we can wake up and feel we've done the right thing'. These women framed their move as putting their children's futures first, drawing on the ideals of intensive mothering. Yet they were also pushing against the traditional gender norms that persisted in their particular family hierarchies.

This theme has discussed 'finding a balance' as an ongoing process of becoming both a good mother and an independent woman. Participants did so by reflexively negotiating a more egalitarian division of household and caring responsibilities, mainly with their husbands and sometimes within gendered family hierarchies. Everyday consumption practices, including changing nappies, doing the housework, arranging childcare and feeding the family were key sites in which gender norms were both challenged and reproduced. Section 5.4 examines how participants drew on their marginal position, as ethnic minority women living in the UK, to frame their mothering and consumption practices as a further opportunity to push the boundaries of gender norms.

## **5.4 Socialising the next generation with the ‘best of both worlds’: motherhood as an opportunity for change**

This theme extends consumer research in which South Asian mothers are regarded as ‘cultural gatekeepers’ who instil their children with South Asian cultural values and preserve traditional family hierarchies (Lindridge and Hogg 2006:990; Lindridge et al. 2004). Section 5.4.1 discusses how participants were reflexively selecting the ‘best’ parts of their religious and cultural heritage to encourage their child’s development. Section 5.4.2 considers how participants were seeking to pass on the ‘best’ parts through ‘choice’ rather than ‘duty’. Section 5.4.3 considers how participants often felt responsible for managing this process, as both good mothers and independent women. Throughout this theme, participants reflected on their gender socialisation and negotiation of their gender identities (see sections 4.2-4.4). Such reflexivity informed their everyday mothering and consumption practices.

### **5.4.1 Passing on the ‘best’ parts of cultural and religious heritage as part of child’s development**

Existing consumer research has suggested that South Asian mothers often act as ‘cultural gatekeepers’ who ‘exerted their authority in the family through promoting Indian cultural values to their children’ (Lindridge and Hogg 2006:989-90). In contrast, most participants in this study typically seemed to view motherhood as an opportunity for change, as well as preserving South Asian culture and religion. Participants tended to reflect on their understandings of religion and culture to select the ‘best’ aspects to pass on to their children. Marjana explains: ‘I love my religion...and there’s one or two parts of my culture that I’m happy about...I’ve picked out the good bits of each...and I think, yes I can use that’. As Chanda articulates, participants often regarded motherhood as an opportunity to give their children the ‘best of both worlds’. Similarly, Naeema reflected that there were ‘good aspects’ of ‘both that need to be understood, cherished and passed on’.

The 'best' parts of culture typically centred on language and food. Generally participants could understand and speak their, or their parents', native language to varying degrees. First-generation participants could speak English proficiently and were keen to teach their children English as well as their native language. Second- and third-generation participants had typically developed an ability to speak a mix of English and native languages. As Jasvinder explains: 'with my dad and my mum especially, even now it's, we have a strange language. It's, you know, I could have a whole sentence in English and Punjabi mixed completely'.

Like most participants, Raveena felt that speaking native languages was a key way of maintaining a 'connection' with elder generations within the family hierarchy, supporting Lindridge et al.'s (2004) findings. As Namra explains, being able to speak Urdu and Gujarati offers a means to engage with, or 'hold on to that community'. She felt that it was important that she and her children could 'still speak and ...still mingle and integrate with them if needs be'. Yet participants also felt that they should maintain a 'balance of both', between native languages and English:

We speak both Gujarati and English. And [my daughter] needs to know. And I think she does know the difference between the two. She mixes up the odd word sometimes but she speaks in both. Like my husband, one of their friends, like their daughter, we met her and she must have been about nine or ten, and she couldn't speak English because both parents were constantly speaking Gujarati at home, so she really struggled with English. For me it's like she must have a balance of both, so I'll speak to her like that but she needs to be able to speak English and she can. (Nabeela)

Nabeela felt that it was important that her daughter could speak Gujarati, but equally felt that her daughter needs to be able to ‘negotiate an existence within two cultures’, as Lindridge et al. (2004:223) suggest. Much like existing consumer research has found (c.f. Lindridge et al. 2004; Lindridge and Hogg 2006; Sekhon and Szmigin 2011), participants were skilled at switching between languages across different contexts. Passing on this ability to ‘switch’ between languages was one of the ‘best’ parts of culture that participants were keen to transmit to their children.

Many participants regarded food consumption as one of the ‘best’ parts of culture to pass on. For Raveena, food was ‘a really important part of culture’. She described the food she cooked as a ‘fusion’ or ‘mixture’ of different meals. Similarly, Ameena explains, ‘we do, like, pastas and salads and pies, not just Indian food’. These women were typical in providing an ‘amalgamation’ of South Asian and British food, supporting existing research (Lindridge et al. 2004:228; Lindridge and Hogg 2006). Lindridge and Hogg (2006) found there were differences in food socialisation based on religious categories. Their study found that Hindus and Muslims were keen to acknowledge their cooking skills learned from their mothers, but found their Sikh participants had received less encouragement to learn to cook. In contrast, the (few) participants that were raised in Sikh households (Raveena and Jasvinder) were encouraged to learn to cook ‘Asian’ food. For example, Raveena reflects that her mother taught her the tacit skills of ‘Asian’ cooking: ‘in Asian cooking, there's no measurements. There's no, like, put a spoon of this, 200 grams of this. No. It's literally put a handful of this in, put this to taste’. She can now ‘adapt’ her skills to make other, non-Asian dishes: ‘I've made my own take on lasagnes and things and it lets you experiment a bit more.’ Most participants, regardless of their religious background, reflected that food was a key way in which their children could have the ‘best of both worlds’.

Yet participants also regarded the responsibility to give their children the ‘best of both worlds’ as part of ensuring their child’s development. For example, Chanda felt that cooking was a useful ‘skill’ for her children to have, while Anita was keen for her daughter to become skilled at cooking healthy, British or ‘Asian’ food. These women saw their children’s food socialisation as a key part of their identity as good mothers who ensure their child’s development, as much like the mothers in Cairns et al.’s (2013) study. As Raveena notes, learning how to cook would help her son to become ‘a bit more independent’. Giving their children the ‘best of both worlds’ was intertwined with the norms of intensive mothering.

For many second-generation Muslim participants, the ‘best of both worlds’ was also a continuation of their differentiation between culture and religion, which helped them to become independent women (see sections 4.3.3.1; 4.4.2). Reflexivity was shaping their mothering practices, especially for participants who had daughters. They were keen for their daughters to become independent women, as Marjana explains:

It’s in the culture and it’s not in our religion, you know. And then in our culture, they’ll say, oh, a girl has to stay home and cook for her husband and look after the family and she can’t go to college and she can’t go studying and she can’t work. Well, no, she can go and study, she can go and work. If she can juggle life, you know, look after kids or put them in nursery, or work part-time, you know, she can do that. Our religion doesn’t stop... you know, a woman can have her independence but our culture has made it out that, no, women can’t, they’ve got to stay home, they’ve got to look after their husbands, and I’ve learnt that and I think, well, no, so I wouldn’t be bringing my daughters into this. I’ll be pushing them and saying, well, go and study, go and work (Marjana)

Here, Marjana's reflections on her gender identity negotiation are enabling her to develop new ways of mothering. She reflects that her own approach is very different from the gender socialisation that she experienced. Similarly, Ashira reflected that her mothering practices were very different to elder generations. She felt that her grandmother was concerned with culture: '[she] was like, why is she going to university, she's not allowed to work? Whereas in our religion yes, of course I'm allowed to work'. These reflections shaped the way Ashira planned to socialise her daughter: 'she's going to get the best of both worlds'. These women often continued to contrast their new gender identities as independent women with their upbringing in traditional family hierarchies. As Marjana reflects: 'my kind of thinking is completely different to my mum's, how I bring my daughters up'.

These participants were not encouraging their children to 'turn their backs' on their cultural and religious heritage, as others have found (Bhopal 1997:488; McAlexander et al. 2014). In contrast, they were teaching their children to become more confident in negotiating their gender identities. As Namra reflects:

So I want my child to have the best... I've pushed for this and it's worked out, for my kids to have that, that they can have that independence and live their lives without having to be westernised. You know you can do that and still have that. Whereas we felt we had to be a certain way to fit in with the way people - you don't. (Namra)

Namra felt that she had 'pushed' for her daughters to become 'independent', but not simply by becoming 'westernised'. Passing on the 'best' parts of her religion meant teaching her daughters how to be 'self-confident' as young British Muslim women: 'this is your faith, be proud of who you are...nothing can hold you back'. She wanted her daughters to 'embrace society' but also be able to 'hold themselves if they are confronted with issues'. Ensuring



her daughters' independence was particularly important for Namra. She reflected that her own independence was limited because she did not go to university: 'you only have one chance in life, you look back and you regret'.

Indeed, most participants were keen to avoid socialising their children with traditional gender norms. For example, Jasvinder felt that traditional gender norms were a 'cultural problematic', although she was keen to teach her daughter about other aspects of her (and her husband's) heritage. In particular, participants who had sons were often keen to transmit egalitarian gender norms. These women had often been treated differently by their parents, based on gender and position in the family hierarchy (see section 4.2; 4.3), and did not want their children to have similar experiences. For instance, Chanda wanted to 'try and be as like fair as possible' in the way she treated both her son and daughter. She reflected that 'when I was growing up I felt my mum was more attached to my brother than she was to me'. She felt strongly that she wanted to treat her children 'equally'. She encouraged both her children to play with 'a little like rolling pin and board' so that both could learn to make chapattis, if they wished. Women like Chanda were pushing for egalitarian gender norms by encouraging their sons (and daughters) to play an active (and equal) role in housework. Samia encouraged her son to 'help out with certain chores around the home'. She reflects that her son now regards 'helping out at home' as 'normal': 'I think that's good because then it becomes second nature, you don't think twice about it'. For many participants, motherhood was an opportunity to encourage their children to negotiate new gender identities and challenge traditional gender norms.

As well as being reflexive about what to pass on to their children, participants also felt that the way they did so was rather different from their parents' approaches, as section 5.4.2 discusses.

#### **5.4.2 Teaching moral values through ‘choice’ rather than ‘duty’**

For many women in this study, religion was regarded as a parenting resource for teaching their children moral values. Research has found that Muslim parents typically use Islam as a moral framework for parenting (Franceschelli and O’Brien 2014). In this study, both Muslim and non-Muslim women (see Table 3.2) drew on their understandings of religion as a parenting resource. For example, Ashira reflects: ‘it’s your moral guidance, it’s to teach you right from wrong’. Their understanding of religion guided their mothering practices, as Fatima explains:

It’s not necessarily about Islam, it’s about being a good person...it’s not just praying... it’s the way she treats her parents, the way she treats her teachers, people around her. (Fatima)

Fatima regarded Islam as a valuable parenting resource to teach her children how to be a ‘good person’. Similarly, Parminder reflected that the underlying values of her, and her husband’s religious backgrounds (Hinduism and Christianity) could ‘teach’ her child ‘truth’, ‘honesty’ and ‘respect’. Reflecting on their understanding of religion often informed their mothering and consumption practices. For Raveena, visiting the Gurdwara<sup>12</sup> and praying with her mother-in-law was important in helping to her child develop ‘good habits’, such as ‘being respectful of people’.

However, participants also felt that they were passing on their cultural and religious heritage in new ways, compared to their parents. In particular, participants with daughters contrasted their approach to their own gender socialisation as South Asian daughters (see section 4.2).

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<sup>12</sup> A Sikh place of worship

For example, Anita reflected that her parents were ‘just obsessed about me wearing the headscarf’. She felt that her parents gave her little choice, and were more concerned about preserving family honour: ‘they weren’t bothered about how much I was practicing or what my behaviour was, it was more how I was seen, how I was perceived’. However, she now feels that there is a ‘massive generational divide’ between her parents and her own approach. Similarly, Chanda reflected that she ‘had to learn to cook and do other things’, whereas her brother ‘didn’t have to do anything’. In contrast, these women framed their transmission of culture and religion as a ‘choice’, rather than a duty. As Fatima explains:

...it’s up to her whether she takes it on, if you know what I mean. So we can do our bit and teach them and that is it and that’s where she goes, and instil the good things in life. (Fatima)

Parminder, who had an interfaith marriage, would ‘rather [my child] chooses’ if or how to follow any religion. Anita felt strongly that she wanted her daughter to ‘take the best parts of both’ culture and religion, but in a way that was different from her mother:

I want her to use what sits with her best, rather than imposing it on her...I wouldn’t judge her against my cultural or my mum’s cultural markers to say this makes a really good daughter, or wife, or mother. (Anita)

Similarly, Chanda reflected that she ‘wouldn’t put pressure on [my daughter], like learning how to make chapattis’. She wanted pass on these cultural traditions ‘by choice’ rather than ‘force’. By offering their children, especially their daughters, a sense of choice, these participants were reflexively seeking to challenge gender norms as well as transmitting culture and religion.

In particular, second- and third-generation Muslim participants often framed the notion of choice as part of developing new understandings of their religion (see section 4.3.3.1). Learning more about Islam had helped women like Ashira and Marjana to justify their educational aspirations. Yet these women also wanted their children to choose if and how to practice Islam. They felt that giving their children the opportunity to choose was part of their responsibility as good Muslim mothers. Ashira explains:

...the way our religion works, nobody else can influence you in that way anyway, so even if you wear the full garb, and you dress completely modestly and you're wearing the headscarf, if you're doing it because you're forced to and you really don't want to, there's no point. So, I'll provide her with everything as far as I can and her dad can, and then it's up to her to implement it if that's what she believes. It's about what she believes inside. (Ashira)

Similarly, Jameela felt strongly that her children should be well-educated, which included learning about Islam. She felt that education and Islam were intertwined: 'If I can give them education, [it's] the best thing I can give as a parent...it's completing half of my religion...half of my duties as a parent'. Through their everyday mothering and consumption practices, such as praying, learning to read the Qur'an, and choosing whether to wear the headscarf, they could educate their children about religion, by emphasising choice rather than duty. If becoming educated is a key part of becoming 'a better Muslim' (Ramji 2007:1182), being a good mother meant encouraging their children to become educated and independent too.

Indeed, many participants felt ultimately responsible for giving their children the 'best of both worlds'. Yet the process was ongoing, often difficult to manage and required a great deal of effort, as section 5.4.3 discusses.

### **5.4.3 Mothers' responsibility to manage the process**

Many women in this study often invested significant amounts of time, effort and resources to educate their children about their cultural and religious heritage. For example, Anita felt strongly that her child should learn Arabic, but she was not taught to read it as a child, which made it 'very hard to implement...or to understand'. As a result, Anita found she had to 'go to great efforts' to teach herself, so that she could help her child.

In particular, women whose husbands came from different ethnic and/or religious backgrounds also found they had to make extensive efforts to give their children the 'best of both worlds'. For instance, Jasvinder described how she devoted a great deal of time and resources to observe certain festivals and traditions for her daughter. She explains: 'I did my best to do all of that, I had no idea what I was doing, but I, sort of, looked online, you know, thank God for Google'. Through devoting intense efforts to perform cultural and religious consumption practices, participants were reproducing the norms of intensive mothering, supporting recent research (Cappellini and Yen 2016). These women tended to regard themselves as ultimately responsible for socialising their children with the 'best of both worlds'. As Jasvinder explains:

...my department is to do all of these things, and I will do it because I want it to represent something for her. I think it's more for [daughter] as well that she needs, she should see both sides. (Jasvinder)

Yet many participants found that they could not spend enough time teaching their children the 'best' parts of their cultural and religious heritage. The main reason participants gave was linked to their identities as independent women. They had to find time amongst their work and other domestic and caring responsibilities. For instance, Fatima felt that teaching

her daughter to pray for the required five times a day was not possible, especially when her second child was very young: ‘we used to do it in the morning but since I’ve had [my son] I just find that hard’. As Chanda notes, her mother had also struggled to pass on her cultural and religious heritage sufficiently well: ‘I feel like, as I was growing up, my parents were always working so they didn’t have the time to instil some of the culture and the reasons behind things’. As a result, participants like Chanda felt strongly about passing on the ‘best’ parts. However, as Chanda reflects, they also felt that they sometimes lacked the cultural capital to do so: ‘I don’t know as much about religion as I probably should do...And I’d want my daughter to know all those things’.

To overcome their time scarcity and lack of knowledge, participants often outsourced some cultural and religious practices within their support networks. Typically, this meant drawing on family members within their family hierarchies and taking their children to places of worship. For example, Chanda felt that she was ensuring that her daughter ‘gets some of the culture and religion from my mum and my aunty’ who ‘do things with her and take her to the temple’. Raveena planned to enlist the support of her mother-in-law, who would take her son to the Gurdwara. Most Muslim participants ensured that their children attended classes within their religious community, for example to learn Arabic so that they could read the Qur’an.

Although participants were often able to delegate some of the everyday transmission of their cultural and religious heritage, participants often felt judged as to whether they were teaching their children appropriately. Participants often compared themselves to other mothers that they knew. Namra’s case is typical: she compared herself to her sister-in-law who ‘doesn’t have a job’ and whose ‘focus is her children’. Although Namra was keen to ensure her children learn about Islam, she also views practices such as ‘going to Mosque’, ‘Mosque

work', 'reading the Qur'an' and 'praying' as measures of good motherhood. Namra felt these responsibilities were an integral part of ensuring their child's development into 'well-rounded children', but found that these standards were sometimes difficult to fulfil:

...sometimes I just don't know what I am or who I am. You just get lost and you think how should you be? You should be happy more. You're telling them, you're comparing them... sometimes I don't know, will it turn out all right or do you still feel that you have to keep your foot on it. If you take your pedal off the gear, I don't know. I just say sometimes I feel like I worry, you constantly worry about that situation. (Namra)

This excerpt captures how many participants were 'self-monitoring' and 'shaping their maternal behaviours' as part of their identity as good mothers, much like the new mothers in Budds et al.'s (2017:25) research on new mothers. For the women in this study, such self-surveillance often extended beyond the early stages of their child's development. Participants were 'constantly learning how to display good mothering' through everyday consumption practices well beyond the 'transitional phase' of motherhood, supporting the findings of recent research (Cappellini and Yen 2016:1279; Phillips and Broderick 2014). Despite being able to outsource some of the transmission of cultural and religious heritage, participants typically saw themselves as ultimately responsible for giving their children the 'best of both worlds'.

## **5.5 Concluding remarks to this chapter**

This chapter has presented the ways in which participants negotiated new gender identities as both good mothers and independent women. Throughout the chapter, consumption practices were key sites in which gender norms are both challenged and reproduced in

complex ways. Most participants embraced South Asian cultural traditions surrounding birth, which usually meant that they were less susceptible to the norms of nesting. Such consumption seemed much less of a proxy for good motherhood than that found in existing consumer research on (mainly white) mothers. Participants found that becoming experts on their own child was a complex process, but many were developing strategies to negotiate competing forms of expert advice. Beyond the transition to motherhood, participants sought to ‘find a balance’ between their identities as independent women and good mothers. Typically, ‘finding a balance’ meant negotiating a more egalitarian division of domestic and caring responsibilities, both with their husbands and within family hierarchies. Motherhood also opened up new possibilities for many participants to give their children the ‘best of both worlds’. As they did so, they were often socialising their children with more egalitarian gender norms.

The following chapter (Chapter 6) brings together the findings from Chapters 4 and 5, alongside the theoretical approach discussed in the literature review (section 2.5), to develop a framework to understand participants’ experiences. In particular, the discussion will focus on the ways and extent to which participants could negotiate new gender identities and challenge gender norms as they became mothers.



## Chapter 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Introduction

The two previous chapters (4 and 5) presented the findings of this study in relation to existing research, highlighting the contribution of this research. Chapter 4 found that participants' journeys to motherhood centred on reflexively negotiating their gender identities as independent women. Chapter 5 suggested that participants incorporate motherhood into their gender identities through their mothering and consumption practices, which are key sites in which South Asian women are reproducing and challenging gender norms. Together with the theoretical approach discussed in section 2.5, this chapter examines how South Asian women negotiate new gender identities as both good mothers and independent women.

Figure 6.1 illustrates how participants incorporate motherhood into their gender identity across several key overlapping fields: the family field, (British) South Asian cultural and religious field(s), work and education field(s) and the British cultural field<sup>13</sup>. The diagram captures how participants' negotiations are shaped by their habitus and trajectory to motherhood. As they became independent women, they developed a reflexive habitus (Sweetman 2003). For example, most participants developed reflexivity and forms of capital from negotiating access to university, while others did so having been through divorce. Although participants were socialised with traditional gender norms, they were positioned differently within these overlapping fields, particularly the family field, which shaped their trajectories to motherhood.

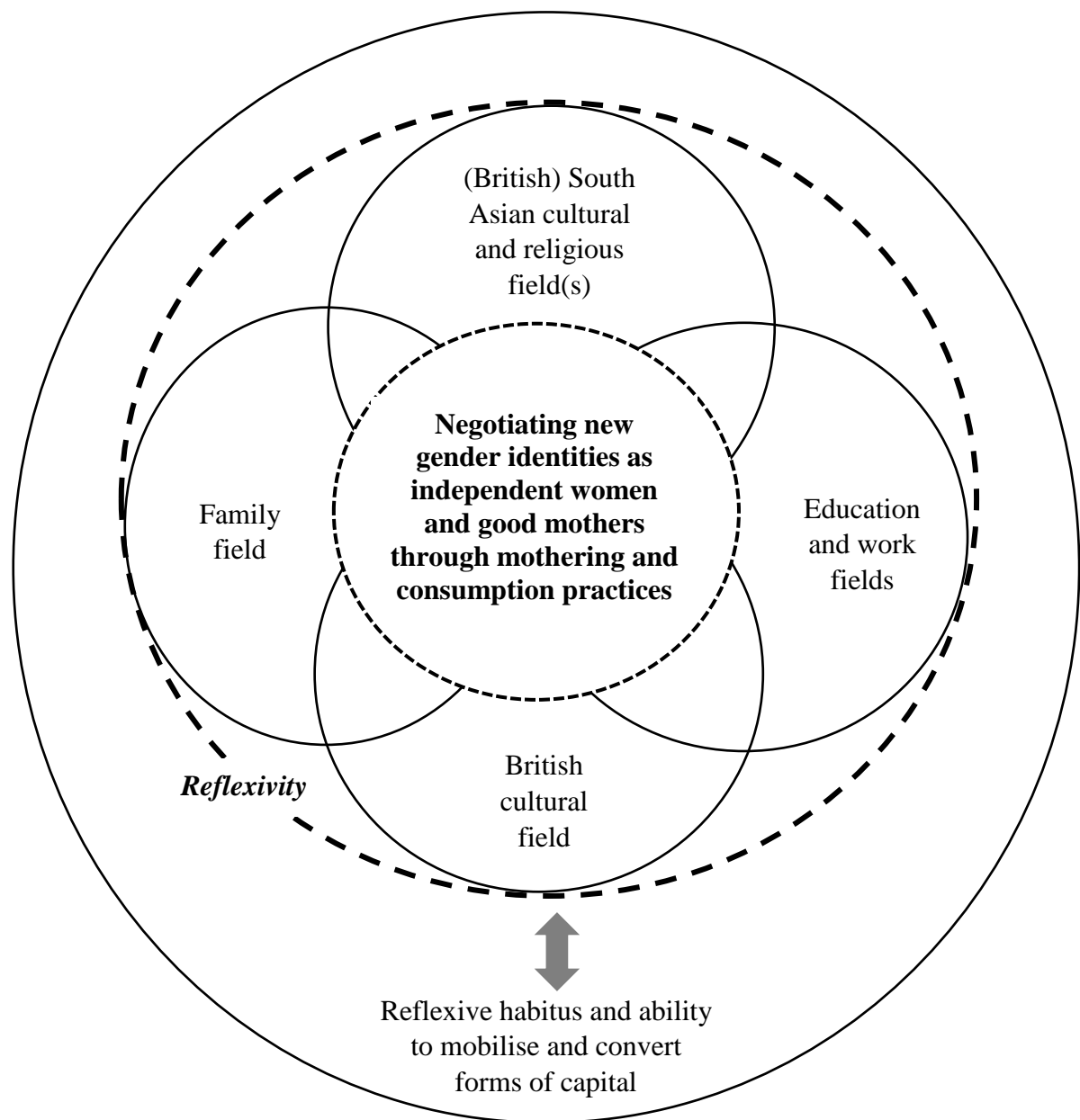
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<sup>13</sup> It is recognised that first-generation participants would not have been socialised at the intersection of the British cultural field, but encountered this field on migrating to the UK as adults.

Figure 6.1 also shows how participants' position within these multiple fields was not static. As participants negotiated their identities through mothering and consumption practices, they challenge and reproduce gender norms. In doing so, their position within these fields is mutable, albeit to different degrees. As women negotiated their gender identities as independent women, they had sometimes negotiated a more favourable position within the family field. Yet when participants married and started a family, their position in the family field may also have shifted, as they may also become part of their husbands' family hierarchies.

**Figure 6.1**

**Understanding South Asian women's ability to negotiate new gender identities as both good mothers and independent women**



Section 6.2 suggests that participants accrued capital and strategies to mobilise such capital (Erel 2010) as they negotiated their gender identities as independent women. In doing so, their habitus operated across multiple fields, and became reflexive (Franceschelli 2011; Reay et al. 2009; Sweetman 2003), which enabled participants to push the boundaries of gender norms (McNay 1999a). Section 6.3 examines how participants often chose to reproduce South Asian cultural and consumption practices surrounding birth, and outlines how they consume competing forms of expert advice. Sections 6.4 and 6.5 focus on how participants negotiate new gender identities as both good mothers and independent women. Section 6.4 examines the extent to which participants negotiate domestic and caring responsibilities. Section 6.5 focuses on how participants reflexively socialise the next generation through their mothering and consumption practices.

## **6.2 Becoming an independent woman: A reflexive habitus and trajectory to motherhood**

Traditional gender norms pervaded participants' gender socialisation within their family hierarchies. Within the family field and (British) South Asian cultural and religious fields (see Figure 6.1), traditional gender norms formed part of the structure of these fields. Participants' habitus was originally formed across these fields, but as they entered the fields of education and, later, work, they became reflexively aware of their socialisation with traditional gender norms.

Such reflexive awareness prompted them to mobilise forms of capital, for example cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications and skills, social capital from social networks and resources, economic capital gained from pursuing (graduate) jobs. Through negotiating new gender identities as independent women, across multiple social fields, participants developed their ability to 'strategize' about how best to convert and employ their

capital (Erel 2010:647). At the same time, their habitus continued to be shaped by the family and South Asian fields. They remained part of these fields, because of their position within South Asian family hierarchies. Yet their habitus was also changing as they learned how to negotiate and push the boundaries of gender norms. These findings support the notion that habitus can become reflexive (Reay et al. 2009; Sweetman 2003:529), when formed across multiple social fields that differ from the field(s) in which habitus was originally formed (Adkins 2004; Franceschelli 2013; McNay 1999a; Reay et al. 2009).

Second- and third-generation Muslim participants were particularly reflexive of their understanding of culture and religion, which enabled them to develop Islamic capital (Franceschelli 2013; Franceschelli and O'Brien 2014; Ramji 2007). Women whose fathers encouraged education could negotiate new identities as independent women by demonstrating their social mobility (Ahmad 2001), but they could also negotiate their future position within family hierarchies. Women who could draw on these strategies could push the boundaries of gender norms, although these often came with contradictions and compromises, such as location, subject choice and socialising arrangements. For example, Namra's father encouraged her education, but she had to compromise by living at home and studying at a local university, while her brothers were allowed to study at the best institutions. Ashira negotiated her subject choice (and future career), but as most of her fellow students were male, she found her social movements were monitored more closely.

Similarly, those who drew on social capital derived from positive role models within the family (Crozier and Davies 2006; Shah et al. 2010) could also negotiate access to university, while those at the top of gendered sibling hierarchies often found negotiations more difficult as they were more restricted. Nevertheless, these strategies and forms of capital became part of participants' reflexive habitus, which was operating across multiple fields (Reay et al.

2009; Sweetman 2003). Their reflexive habitus shaped these women's trajectories to motherhood, and made a lasting impact on their subsequent negotiations of their gender identity as mothers.

Non-Muslim participants also developed a reflexive habitus, albeit in their pursuit of post-graduate education. Rather than developing religious capital (like their Muslim counterparts), these women reflexively drew on cultural and social capital developed from attaining their first degree. As they expressed a desire to pursue post-graduate qualifications, they were reflexively aware of their parents' gendered expectations for them to marry and start a family. Yet they could mobilise capital gained from attending university, for example, to gain funding and/or work to fund their qualifications themselves. They incorporated these strategies into their reflexive habitus and trajectories to motherhood.

The original habitus of second-generation Muslim non-graduates was characterised by a lack of reflexivity surrounding social mobility, as well as a lack of economic, cultural, and social capital (Allen 2002). However, most of these participants entered the work field upon leaving compulsory education, and continued to work after they married and became mothers. In doing so, these women were reflexive about their socialisation with traditional gender norms, and (later) recognised the importance of higher education and work as a source of independence. Such reflexivity became part of their habitus and their trajectory to motherhood, albeit often tinged with a sense of regret. For example, Namra regrets not having been to university, which drives her to encourage her daughters' education. Her regret fuels her determination to change her (and her children's) habitus. Those who did not attend university, but became reflexive, independent women, have higher aspirations for their own children than their parents had for them.

Participants who had experienced turbulent first marriages and divorce, were also reflexive of their socialisation with traditional gender norms, as well as their position with the family hierarchy (i.e. family field). Such reflexivity brought about a ‘painful awareness’ of how their habitus limited their ability to challenge traditional gender norms, as other research has suggested (Adams 2006:525). However, as these women divorced, they learned more about Islam, distinguishing between their understandings of religion and culture. In doing so, they accrued Islamic capital (Franceschelli 2013; Franceschelli and O’Brien 2014; Ramji 2007) that formed part of their trajectory to motherhood. For example, Marjana’s painful reflections of her parents’ discouragement of her education, combined with her newly developed understandings of culture and religion, enable her to change how she raises her own children. Despite their difficult experiences, they developed a reflexive habitus (Reay et al. 2009; Sweetman 2003) that shapes how they incorporate motherhood into their gender identities.

### **6.2.1 Starting a family and delaying motherhood: A more difficult boundary to (reflexively) cross?**

The findings suggest that many participants regarded motherhood as ‘a spanner in the works’; they were acutely aware of how motherhood could jeopardise their (often hard-won) gender identity as independent women. Participants who chose to delay the timing of their pregnancy could overcome the feeling of motherhood as a disruption to their gender identity more easily than those who did not.

Since several participants managed to challenge gender norms regarding higher education and marriage, they might also be expected to challenge the norm of starting a family straight after marriage. However, many participants did not exert control over when to start a family.

Some women, like Chanda and Jameela, suggested that age was a factor, since delaying their marriage had meant that they were older and were concerned about conceiving.

Yet many Muslim participants seemed resigned to the expectation to have children straight away, despite having pushed the boundaries surrounding higher education and marriage. For example, Rafeeqa explains: ‘in our culture, you get married and you have kids’. It could be that these women did not feel able/comfortable to discuss these matters with their husbands, or they may lack awareness of how/where to access contraception, particularly if doing so is less common for Muslim women. It is possible that for these participants, their Islamic beliefs may be intertwined with their view of contraception (since some also referred to Islam when explaining their choice to breastfeed). However, these are speculations, as most participants did not discuss contraception, and the sample includes relatively few non-Muslim participants (see section 3.6 for reflections on the sample). Since these issues are rather sensitive, the researcher did not question participants on their use of contraception, instead prioritising rapport and trust with participants.

However, it would appear that most non-Muslim participants had consumed some form of contraception, as they spoke of choosing to delay having children (see Table 3.2). Most Muslim participants seemed less reflexive of the possibility to delay having children. Yet, whether participants delayed motherhood or not, most negotiated new gender identities as both good mothers and independent women.

Section 6.3 examines how participants’ position at the intersection of multiple fields shaped how they negotiated new identities as good mothers.

### **6.3 Understanding how participants were positioned to negotiate their identities as good mothers**



The findings suggest that consumption played an important role as participants negotiated new gender identities as good mothers. Participants consumed appropriately during the transition to motherhood, but there were two key ways in which their consumption differed to that shown in studies of mainly white, middle-class mothers. This section suggests that these differences in consumption practices emerged from participants' position at the intersection of several overlapping fields. Section 6.3.1 discusses how participants reflexively chose to reproduce South Asian cultural traditions surrounding birth, rather than demonstrating their readiness by purchasing most of their baby products before the birth (Afflerback et al. 2014). Section 6.3.2 examines participants' ability to become experts on their own child, which was shaped by their trajectories to motherhood and their ability to mobilise forms of capital, as well as their position within the family field.

### **6.3.1 Reflexively reproducing South Asian cultural traditions surrounding birth**

Chapter 5 suggests that many participants delayed purchasing baby products until after the baby arrived, which is different to the way in which many mothers typically consume baby products during the transition to motherhood (Afflerback et al. 2014; Prothero 2002; Voice Group 2010a; 2010b). For these participants, being prepared for the baby's arrival did not necessarily mean demonstrating that they had all the 'right' baby products or 'props', unlike their white, middle-class counterparts (Miller 2014:166). For example, several women did not purchase a pram before birth. Often participants were happy to receive prams and other large baby items as gifts, and were less involved in these purchases, in contrast to the mothers in Thomsen and Sorensen's (2006) study.

Participants negotiated new gender identities as good mothers at the intersection of different fields: the family field, the (British) South Asian cultural field and the British cultural field

(see Figure 6.1). The norm of nesting to demonstrate becoming a good mother, which dominates the British cultural field, differs from the norms of good motherhood and birth in the (British) South Asian cultural and family fields. Participants typically reflected that they were happy to follow South Asian cultural traditions, such as staying indoors/ at their mother's house with lots of family support, and extensive gift giving. Being prepared for motherhood is different for these women; their position within the family and (British) South Asian fields meant that they could often rely on family support networks to buy/gift items they may need in early motherhood. They welcomed the support from within the family and (British) South Asian fields that was associated with these cultural practices.

Moreover, participants were typically aware that their South Asian cultural practices meant they appeared to receive more family support than white British mothers. For example, they often recounted how their midwives had asked whether they would be staying at their mother's house after birth. They reflexively chose to reproduce these practices, which are intertwined with the collectivist values of South Asian culture. In doing so, they reproduced South Asian norms of good mothering, in which good mothers keep babies inside until their immune systems are more developed. They often saw themselves as different from white British mothers, through their different consumption practices. During the transition to motherhood, they negotiated new gender identities as good mothers using the South Asian norms of good mothering and intensive motherhood. For example, Jasvinder recalls her shock at seeing a white mother who had taken her newborn baby shopping, and reflected that she would be deemed a bad mother for doing so.

At the same time, participants seemed less susceptible to experience vulnerability and consumption-induced liminality than the mainly white, middle-class mothers in existing research (Voice Group 2010a; 2010b). Despite their position at the intersection of multiple

fields, participants' choice to reproduce supportive cultural practices that were specific to the (British) South Asian and family fields, explains why many participants did not feel the need to purchase most of their baby products beforehand.

### **6.3.2 Reflexively negotiating the competing forms of expert advice**

The findings suggest that participants often went to significant lengths to become experts on their own child, as they negotiated competing forms of expert advice. The process was more complex than seen in studies of mainly white mothers (Hays 1996, Miller 2007). Women in this study become experts on their own child at the intersection of several fields. Within the (British) South Asian field and the family field, older female family members are traditionally seen as experts. As such, they occupy a higher status position than their white British counterparts, in their respective fields. Participants' position within South Asian family hierarchies intensified their experiences of negotiating competing forms of advice, as these hierarchies can provide both extensive support networks, and sources of judgement through exertions of expert knowledge.

Due to the complexity and diversity of participants' family hierarchies, some participants found it more difficult than others to become experts on their own child. Participants who were university-educated were often very proactive in monitoring their pregnancy and child's development. They invested their cultural capital by learning about pregnancy and parenting, to ensure their child's development, much like their white, middle-class counterparts (Miller 2007). Rather than moving away from formal expert advice (Miller 2007), they were combining and discarding elements of both forms of expert advice, especially with regards to food consumption. However, in doing so, they were also questioning and negotiating the status of the expert advice of female relatives within the (British) South Asian and family fields. While studies of mainly white mothers (Miller 2007;

Kehily 2014; Hays 1996) suggest that many women negotiate competing forms of advice, they do not fully capture how South Asian women's position within family hierarchies can powerfully shape their experiences of becoming experts on their own child.

Some participants were positioned in family hierarchies in which close female family members, especially mothers and mothers-in-law, felt threatened by participants' use of formal expert advice. Women like Anita and Parminder, despite possessing high levels of cultural capital, were frustrated by being caught between these competing forms of advice. For example, Parminder found it very difficult to balance the contestation between her mother's and her doctor's advice, which she saw as a 'fight' between 'the old and the new'. These women were able to draw on their cultural capital to question both forms of advice, and eventually developed their own blend of expert advice. However, they found it more difficult than those who were positioned in family hierarchies in which close female relatives were less inclined to exert their authority as experts within the hierarchy. For example, women like Raveena and Rafeeqa also had high levels of cultural capital, but found that their mothers and/or mothers-in-law were highly supportive of their blended approach to following expert advice.

Similarly, having a supportive husband enabled participants to reflexively blend forms of expert advice more easily, and even acted as a counterbalance when mothers and mothers-in-law were trying to exert their authority as experts. For example, Shaheera's mother-in-law questioned her choice to breastfeed, but Shaheera drew on both her cultural capital (her knowledge that breastfeeding is recommended by formal experts) and her husband's support (he told Shaheera he would support her 'all the way'). Shaheera reflected that 'the only way I did get through it... was because of my husband's support'. Here, we can see that reflexivity and cultural capital alone might not fully capture participants' experience of becoming

experts on their own child. Women's position within the family field also shaped their ability to do so. Indeed, participants' position within the family field was shaped by their trajectory to motherhood, since those who had found a supportive husband, like Shaheera, are well-positioned to exert their authority as experts on their own child.

The findings also suggest that support networks are a key site in which participants become experts on their own child. Free, web-based group messaging via mobile phones are a significant way in which participants develop and maintain their support networks. These support networks are an important source of social capital, offering informational and emotional support. Existing consumer research on the transition to motherhood (Voice Group 2010a; 2010b; Ogle et al. 2013; Thomsen and Sorensen 2006) offers little insight into how women's ability to develop support networks may affect their experiences of becoming experts on their own child. Yet participants' reflexive habitus and trajectory to motherhood shaped their ability to develop and maintain their support networks.

For example, most second- and third-generation participants lived in close proximity to their own parents and siblings (see Table 3.2). Yet Bhopal's (1998) study of South Asian women's support networks suggested that South Asian women often move away from their families, and tend to live with their husbands in the paternal family home when they become mothers. Bhopal (1998) found that even when South Asian mothers live near to their own parents, their main source of support is their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. Her study also suggested that these South Asian mothers typically occupy a lower position in the family hierarchy. Their low-status position in the family field meant that they were 'constantly judged' on their mothering performance by their mothers- and sisters-in-law (Bhopal 1998:487).

However, most women in this study did not live with their in-laws. Almost all of those who had done so had since moved out. The main source of emotional support for most second- and third-generation participants was not their mother-in-law, but their own mothers, sisters, and sometimes female cousins. In contrast to Bhopal's (1998) findings, these participants maintain a strong support network with close female relatives, even after they married and became mothers. Even participants whose sisters did not live nearby, including some first-generation women, could maintain their support network. They gained emotional and informational support via online messaging, phone and video calls. These women were well-positioned to become experts on their own child, since they could mobilise social capital from their kin-based support network.

Drentea and Moran-Cross's (2005) research on mothers' use of web-based support networks suggests that women with lower levels of capital, especially economic and cultural capital, may be at a disadvantage to develop support networks. However, participants who possessed low-levels of such capital, like Fareeda and Zahara, mobilise social capital by maintaining their kin-based support network. The availability of free web-based messaging, combined with increasingly lower internet costs via mobile devices, means that even those with limited economic and cultural capital can mobilise social capital via support networks. In turn, such social capital could generate cultural capital, in the form of knowledge and information that they can use to become experts on their own child. Furthermore, these networks can be a less judgemental form of support, compared with that provided by in-laws in Bhopal's (1998) study.

In contrast, participants who did not have strong relationships with female relatives (e.g. sisters, cousins) found it more difficult to develop a support network. For example, Namra lived far away from her parents and siblings, and Anita had no sisters. For these women,

motherhood brought opportunities to develop support networks beyond the family field. Several participants had developed networks via health centres, parenting classes (e.g. NCT, free playgroups and breast-feeding groups). Non-Muslim participants with high levels of cultural, economic and social capital, like Raveena and Jasvinder, found these networks a valuable source of informational and emotional support.

Yet participants often found that formal parenting groups tended to heighten their feelings of being judged. A small number of second-generation Muslim participants, including Namra and Anita, reflected that formal classes/groups made them feel different to the predominantly white, middle-class women in such groups. However, in contrast to Bhopal's (1998) study, participants were often well-positioned to develop their support networks and mobilise their capital. For example, Anita developed informal support networks (a 'midnight group) comprising female colleagues, friends and other mothers they met at formal classes, with mobile messaging apps playing a key role in maintaining such networks. These women used informal support networks to become experts on their own child, by offering and sharing advice and support, much as studies of predominantly white mothers have found (Hays 1996; Miller 2007; Wall 2010). These findings extend existing consumer research on motherhood, which has largely focussed on the consumption of maternity/baby products (Ogle et al. 2013; Voice Group 2010a), lay and formal sources of advice (Kehily 2014; Miller 2005; 2007), and online sources of advice such as 'Mumsnet' (Phillips and Broderick 2014). This study suggests that free web-based messaging apps are an important consumption sites in which mothers negotiate new gender identities as experts on their own child, by developing and maintaining support networks.

To summarise this section (6.3.2), participants' trajectory to motherhood and reflexive habitus enabled them to mobilise different forms of capital. In doing so, they had often

negotiated their living arrangements (e.g. by moving out of their husband's paternal home) and maintained strong support networks where possible. As independent women, they usually occupied a higher position within the family field than the women in Bhopal's (1998) study. Their position enabled them to question and develop a blend of competing forms of advice to become experts on their own child. Yet family hierarchies could nevertheless both hinder or help participants, depending on whether they had family members who shared their view of gender norms, or whether their close female relatives felt the need to exert their status as experts.

#### **6.4 Reflexively challenging the division of domestic and caring responsibilities**

The findings captured how participants became reflexive of their mothers' inability to challenge traditional gender norms. Having pushed the boundaries of gender norms to become independent women, participants then sought to incorporate motherhood into their gender identities. They did so by 'finding a balance', which often meant negotiating the distribution of caring and domestic responsibilities within family hierarchies. Participants' ability to do so was shaped by their trajectories to motherhood and their position at the intersection of multiple, overlapping fields (see Figure 6.1).

Participants who shared an egalitarian view of gender norms with their husbands often found it easier to negotiate a more equitable division of domestic and caring responsibilities. These women were usually educated to (at least) degree-level, and several were married to first-generation husbands. They had negotiated their identity as independent women, improving their levels of cultural (and economic) capital. Those who had married a first-generation husband could circumvent their husbands' family hierarchy and they remained firmly embedded within their own family support network.



Owing to their higher levels of cultural and economic capital, these women were often the main breadwinners, or made similar contributions to household income to their husbands, who were typically low-skilled migrants employed in low-paid jobs. These findings extend existing consumer research (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Thompson 1996), by suggesting that these participants occupied a high-status position within the family field and were well-positioned to negotiate an egalitarian approach to domestic and caring responsibilities with their husbands. They were actively negotiating everyday consumption practices such as feeding the family, shopping and cleaning. A recent study by Lyonette and Crompton (2014) found that British women who earned at least as much as their husbands, were likely to be reflexively aware of traditional gender norms, and seek to negotiate a more equitable division of labour (although no information was offered regarding participants' ethnicity). In line with Lyonette and Crompton's findings, participants with high levels of capital and reflexivity, who made significant contributions to household income, were negotiating more involvement from their husbands. As Williams' (2008:499) study of white British fathers suggests, socio-economic 'circumstances' (e.g. the need for dual-earner households) can beget reflexivity and negotiations in which fathers become more involved in household and parenting responsibilities. The way in which participants like Jameela and Raveena (and their husbands) felt that they were forging new identities by pursuing a 'shared' parenting approach mirrors the experiences of dual-earning white British mothers and fathers who have become reflexive regarding gender norms.

In contrast, second-generation husbands of some Muslim participants like Anita and Nabeela, held more traditional views of gender norms, as did first-generation Pakistani Muslim participants, like Asma and Safiya. Although these women usually had high levels of cultural capital and reflexivity, they often found it more difficult to negotiate household and parenting responsibilities. Those who were working, like Anita and Fatima, were better

able to negotiate consumption practices such as shopping, cooking and parenting than full-time mothers like Safiya. They had negotiated living arrangements outside the joint family home, and were better positioned than the women in Bhopal's (1998) study, who mainly lived with their in-laws in which traditional hierarchies persisted. As working mothers, living in nuclear families, they could challenge their husbands' traditional view of gender norms, as other studies of working mothers have found (Lyonette and Crompton 2014; Usdansky 2011). These findings suggest that returning to work can play a key role in shaping participants' ability to negotiate a more egalitarian approach to domestic and caring responsibilities, particularly when women make a significant contribution to household income.

Many participants negotiated and challenged South Asian cultural norms surrounding childcare. They were aware of the expectation for grandparents to provide childcare, which positioned childcare from female family members as preferable to outsourcing childcare. Existing research (Bhopal 1998) found that young South Asian mothers tend to be heavily dependent on their mothers-in-law for childcare, since they usually live in the paternal home. Bhopal (1998:487) found that although her participants found such childcare beneficial, a significant 'by-product' was that their in-laws were 'constantly criticising' mothers on their parenting. Women in her study did not agree with how their in-laws were treating their children, for example by offering the children sweets and not disciplining them enough.

Whereas the women in Bhopal's (1998) study occupied a low-status position within the family hierarchy, many participants had negotiated living arrangements outside the paternal family hierarchy, most notably those with first-generation husbands. Many of these participants developed support networks that provided wrap-around childcare within their own family hierarchies. They could negotiate a flexible blend of market-based and family-

based childcare, corroborating the findings of emerging research on childcare consumption (Epp and Velagaleti 2014; Huff and Cotte 2013). These findings extend Bhopal's (1998) study by suggesting that there is much diversity in participants' negotiations surrounding childcare. The market can play a key role in participants' negotiations of childcare. Participants with high levels of capital, who made key contributions to household income, and maintained a strong family support network could exert choice in negotiating childcare. The availability of free childcare also helped women like Asma to pursue her studies, despite her lack of income.

Those positioned in less supportive family hierarchies were more critical of support from within the family, and often challenged the expectation for grandparents to provide childcare. University-educated participants tended to demonstrate how market-based care was needed to ensure their child's development (Huff and Cotte 2013). They exerted more control over their children's care than the women in Bhopal's (1998) study, and used market-based childcare as a key way to circumvent their (husband's) family hierarchy. These findings extend Bhopal's (1998) study by suggesting that participants could challenge norms surrounding childcare as they negotiated a balance between their identities as independent women and good mothers. Often participants like Nabeela and Parminder drew on the norms of intensive mothering relating to their child's development, to justify their childcare choices, mirroring the experiences of other working mothers (Christopher 2012; Huff and Cotte 2013).

Section 6.5 discusses participants' ability to socialise their children with the 'best of both worlds'.

## **6.5 Reflexively socialising the next generation: transmitting capital, transforming habitus?**

The findings suggest that motherhood offered participants the opportunity to reflexively socialise their children with the ‘best of both worlds’. Mothering and consumption practices were sites of change and reproduction, as participants reflected on which aspects of their cultural and religious heritage they wanted to pass on. Such reflexivity also shaped the way in which they socialised their children, which was framed around choice rather than duty. They nevertheless felt ultimately responsible for giving their children the ‘best of both worlds’.

For women in this study, the norms of intensive mothering operate across the overlapping fields in which they are positioned. Like many working mothers (Hays 1996), they feel ultimately responsible for ensuring their child’s development, despite not always ‘being there’ (Boyd 2002:463). However, their position at the intersection of different cultural and religious fields makes the process more complex than for their white, middle-class counterparts. Participants were continuously negotiating how to transmit their cultural and religious heritage, through everyday mothering and consumption practices, such as food, clothing and language use. As ethnic minority mothers, the demands of intensive mothering were heightened and extended beyond the transition to motherhood, much as Cappellini and Yen (2014) suggest.

Participants often reflected that mothering and consumption practices were an opportunity to transmit cultural capital to their children that they accrued throughout their trajectories to motherhood. As participants negotiated new gender identities as independent women, they developed forms of capital that enabled them to challenge gender norms across multiple fields. Such capital was not field-dependent (e.g. limited to the work or education field).

Negotiating their gender identities as independent women not only enabled them to work and pursue careers, but also negotiate a high-status position in the family field. These findings contrast with Cappellini and Yen's (2014) study, which found that ethnic minority mothers had to cope with everyday consumption dilemmas, rather than challenge gender norms, such as women's responsibility for feeding the family. In contrast, women in this study were well-positioned to draw on their reflexive habitus and develop new ways of transmitting capital to their children. In doing so, they were engendering changes within their habitus. Women who had sons often sought to socialise their children with egalitarian gender norms. For example, they equally encourage their children to participate in housework, and teach both sons and daughters the ability to cook food from their host country. Participants raise their children within a habitus in which egalitarian gender norms are challenging the traditional norms that persist across multiple fields.

However, some participants found the process of socialising the next generation more difficult than others. Being an independent woman and a good mother usually meant that participants had limited time and resources. Those who had developed strong support networks within the family field could outsource some of their responsibilities, such as taking children to places of worship. Those who lacked the field-specific cultural capital, i.e. the skills and knowledge of certain traditions, languages and practices, outsourced tasks to their support networks and places of worship and/or the internet. Women with first-generation husbands could delegate some responsibilities to their husbands, and use their husbands a source of cultural capital. Their husbands' family could also contribute, enabled by free/low-cost mobile and internet-based communications. In contrast, women like Namra and Anita, who had limited support networks and/or lacked field-specific cultural capital, often felt overwhelmed by having to manage the transmission and outsourcing processes largely themselves.

The findings suggest that participants draw on their religious heritage as a parenting resource for moral values. In particular, second- and third-generation Muslim participants could transmit Islamic capital to their children (Franceschelli 2013; Franceschelli and O'Brien 2014). Through their trajectories to motherhood they deepened their knowledge of Islam, enabling them to transform how they transmitted Islam within their habitus (i.e. as a choice), compared to their own socialisation (as a duty). At the same time, Islamic capital intertwined with the norms of good mothering, by reinforcing participants' Islamic duty as mothers, to educate their children. In doing so, they instil their children with both moral values, as well as the potential for social mobility (Franceschelli and O'Brien 2014). Participants could mobilise Islamic capital to acquire social capital, for example by developing links with Islamic community groups, schools and mosques.

Perhaps the most poignant changes in habitus were for non-graduates who later developed reflexivity and Islamic capital, and those who did so on becoming divorced. These women reflected on a dramatic shift between their parents' traditional views of gender norms, and their own, more egalitarian views. For women like Namra and Marjana, motherhood is a bittersweet opportunity to mobilise and transmit their Islamic capital. Their reflexivity brought about a heightened awareness of their sometimes painful struggles for independence. Yet their transmission of Islamic capital, through mothering and consumption practices, is underpinned by a determination to enable their children to continue to push the boundaries of gender norms, as they do so themselves.

## **6.6 Concluding remarks to this chapter**

This chapter incorporates the theoretical approach outlined in section 2.5 to develop the research contributions identified in the findings chapters (4 and 5). In doing so, the chapter examines participants' ability to negotiate new identities as both independent women and

good mothers, and the role of consumption in this process. Shaped by their trajectories to motherhood, and their movement across multiple fields, participants developed a reflexive habitus and the ability to mobilise different forms of capital, which shape their ongoing negotiation of new gender identities. The theoretical approach helps to explain how participants reflexively reproduced some South Asian norms of good mothering through their consumption practices surrounding birth. The chapter considers the ways in which participants consume and negotiate different forms of expert advice, suggesting that the process was more complex due to their position within family hierarchies, but that participants often drew on strategies used by their white, middle-class counterparts. The discussion examines how participants both reproduce and challenge gender norms as they negotiate a more egalitarian approach to parenting and domestic responsibilities, much like other British working mothers. As ethnic minority mothers, participants were keen to transmit their capital to their children by giving them the ‘best of both worlds’. Their ability to reflexively socialise the next generation is shaped by their position within multiple fields, such that some women with limited support networks find the process more intense than those who have extensive support networks and cultural capital. While the norms of intensive motherhood remain intertwined with participants’ mothering and consumption practices, participants nevertheless seek to engender a reflexive habitus as they negotiate new gender identities.

The concluding chapter (Chapter 7) outlines how the findings chapters (4 and 5) and discussion chapter (6) have addressed the aims of the study. In doing so, the chapter summarises the key contributions of the study and brings the thesis to a close.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter brings the thesis to a close. Section 7.2 revisits the research aims and questions that the thesis has sought to address. Section 7.3 outlines the theoretical contributions that were discussed throughout Chapters 4, 5 and 6. The contributions are summarised in relation to the literature discussed in Chapter 2. Sections 7.4 and 7.5 discuss the marketing and policy implications that arise from this research. Section 7.6 reflects on the limitations of the study and suggests areas for future research.

### **7.2 Research aims and questions**

This thesis is an exploratory study that aimed to understand the role that consumption plays for South Asian women, as they negotiate their gender identities on becoming mothers. A particular focus was how these women incorporate motherhood into their gender identities.

The three research questions were:

- What role does consumption play as South Asian women incorporate motherhood into their gender identities?
- As South Asian women become mothers, how do these women negotiate new gender identities, and what shapes their ability to do so?
- How do these women's negotiations of new gender identities shape their mothering and consumption practices?

This thesis has suggested that consumption plays a complex role in South Asian women's negotiation of their gender identities, both during the transition to motherhood and in everyday mothering and consumption practices. During the transition to motherhood, the research found that participants consumed appropriately to negotiate new gender identities



as good mothers in two distinctive ways. First, participants reflexively chose to reproduce certain South Asian cultural practices, such as remaining indoors and receiving extensive support and gifts, which shaped their consumption practices. Second, participants' negotiation of competing forms of expert advice was more complex and intertwined with the high status of expert advice from female family members as part of the family hierarchy.

Beyond the transition to motherhood, mothering and consumption practices were found to be important sites in which South Asian women negotiate new gender identities as both independent women and good mothers. Mothering and consumption practices surrounding the domestic division of labour, feeding the family, and childcare consumption are key sites in which South Asian women reflexively reproduce and challenge gender norms as they (re-)enter the workforce, mirroring the findings of recent research on British working women (Lyonette and Crompton 2014). Understanding participants' trajectories to motherhood, including their negotiations surrounding higher education, marriage and starting a family, offered significant insight into how they negotiate new gender identities as both independent women and good mothers.

Participants' negotiation of new gender identities was found to shape how they socialised their children through their mothering and consumption practices. As ethnic minority mothers, they seek to give their children the 'best of both worlds', which meant reflecting on gender norms and developing new understandings of their cultural and religious heritage. Nevertheless, they see this responsibility as part of being a good mother, meaning that their position as ethnic minority mothers can intensify the norms of intensive motherhood, as they negotiate their consumption practices (e.g. food, languages) between home and host cultures. Participants who share an egalitarian approach to gender norms with close family members, and who develop strong support networks, could negotiate these norms of intensive

motherhood better than women whose close family members exert their authority as experts, and who have limited support networks.

### **7.3 Theoretical contributions**

This section summarises the main theoretical contributions in relation to the existing research discussed in the literature review. Section 7.3.1 focuses on theoretical contributions to research on negotiating new gender identities and motherhood, while 7.3.2 outlines contributions relating to the consumer research on South Asian women's negotiation of new gender identities.

#### **7.3.1 Consumer research on negotiating new gender identities and motherhood**

This study contributes a means of understanding how consumers' trajectories, (reflexive) habitus, and position within multiple fields shapes their ability to negotiate new identities and challenge norms as they experience a major life-role transition, such as becoming a parent. Extending existing research (c.f. Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2011; Thompson and Üstüner 2015), the theoretical framework encapsulated in Figure 6.1 demonstrates how not all (non-majority) consumers are positioned equally to negotiate new identities and challenge gender norms through their consumption practices. The thesis contributes insight into how consumers who have previously pushed the boundaries of gender norms to negotiate their gender identities may be positioned differently to negotiate new identities during major life-role transitions. Figure 6.1 helps us to understand how participants often found motherhood to be a significant challenge to their identities as independent women, yet the experience of motherhood as a challenge to women's gender identity may not be unique to, or universally experienced by ethnic minority mothers. Such an experience may also occur when women are socialised within a habitus in which they feel they have to push or

struggle to negotiate new identities. Figure 6.1 could also offer insight when examining the experiences of other non-majority consumers during major transitions such as young and/or low-income mothers (c.f. Banister et al. 2016; Hollway 2010; Ponsford 2011), or women for whom access to university and/or employment remains contested or unequal. Similarly, the framework could be used to examine the experiences of those who have overcome other potentially constraining circumstances (e.g. disability, domestic abuse), who may also find it difficult to incorporate motherhood into their gender identities. The thesis contributes a means of understanding consumer's trajectories, their habitus and position across multiple fields, which can further our understanding of how consumers are positioned differently to negotiate new identities and challenge norms as they experience major life-role transitions.

In particular, the research has shown how there is much diversity to South Asian mothers' experiences, with participants' experiences contrasting to the experiences of South Asian women in Bhopal's study (1998). Unlike those in Bhopal's (1998) research, most participants did not live in joint homes. Their strategies of developing support networks with their family and friends and their negotiation of domestic and caring responsibilities are similar to those of middle-class working mothers, particularly those who contribute significantly to household income (Bianchi et al. 2000; Lyonette and Crompton 2014; Miller 2005). Much like their white middle-class counterparts (Bailey 1999), participants saw work as a key part of their gender identity, suggesting that learning to balance gender identities as independent women and good mothers is a common feature of motherhood, particularly for working mothers.

The thesis contributes to existing research on consumption's role during the transition to motherhood (c.f. Afflerback et al. 2014; Voice Group 2010a), which has focussed on consuming appropriately during the transition to motherhood, foregrounding mothers'

experiences of liminality. The findings extend this literature by examining how women's trajectories to motherhood and position across multiple social fields shapes their consumption during the transition to motherhood. In doing so, the thesis offers a means of understanding what shapes women's ability to negotiate new gender identities and challenge gender norms as they become mothers. The findings bring insights into how South Asian mothers consume appropriately during the transition to motherhood, which can both mirror and differ from white middle-class mothers.

As ethnic minority women whose habitus was formed in collectivist cultural and family fields, situated within South Asian family hierarchies, their experiences of consuming appropriately differed from white, middle-class mothers. They were reflexive of their position across multiple fields, but chose to reproduce South Asian cultural and consumption practices that offered them extensive support during the transition to motherhood. During pregnancy and early motherhood they negotiated new identities as good mothers in relation to South Asian norms of intensive mothering (e.g. remaining indoors), which shaped their consumption practices (e.g. delaying purchases until necessary). In contrast to white mothers (c.f. Afflerback et al. 2014; Thomsen and Sorensen 2006; Voice Group 2010a; 2010b), participants seemed less susceptible to consumption-induced liminality during pregnancy, as they often did not negotiate new identities as good mothers by purchasing everything (especially prams) beforehand.

By examining participants' trajectories to motherhood and position across multiple fields, the findings extends literature on the expectation for mothers to consume expert advice and modify consumption practices accordingly (c.f. Atkinson 2014; Kehily 2014; Miller 2007; 2014). As ethnic minority mothers, positioned within fields in which advice from female family members traditionally holds a high, expert status, becoming an expert on their own

child was more complex. However, the findings suggest that participants consumed expert advice in similar ways to their white, middle-class counterparts. Since most women lived in close proximity to their family, and/or lived in nuclear family households, they were less reliant on their in-laws for advice, support and childcare than the South Asian women in Bhopal's (1998) study. Their ability to develop less judgemental support networks, and negotiate a blend of childcare mirrored the findings of recent consumer research on childcare consumption (Epp and Velagaletti 2014; Huff and Cotte 2013). These support networks enabled them to question advice, demonstrate their child's development, and assert their identities as experts on their own child, much like white, middle-class mothers (Miller 2007; Wall 2010).

The findings also contribute to existing research on intensive mothering and consumption of web-based support (Cappellini and Yen 2016; Drentea and Moran-Cross 2005; Phillips and Broderick 2014), by suggesting that mobile technologies and messaging apps are important ways in which mothers can form and maintain support networks. The ability to develop support networks using apps and mobile technologies is likely to be a way in which many women, not just ethnic minority mothers, negotiate new identities as good mothers. Contrary to Drentea and Moran-Cross's (2005) concerns, this thesis posits that even mothers with low levels of economic and cultural capital can mobilise social capital through support networks to negotiate new gender identities as experts on their own child.

Recent consumer research (Cappellini and Yen 2016; Molander 2016; Phillips and Broderick 2014) on motherhood calls for a move away from a role-transition approach. Supporting this growing body of literature, the findings have shown how mothers continue to negotiate their gender identities as good mothers through mothering and consumption practices well beyond the transitional phase (Cappellini and Yen 2016). Furthermore, the thesis consolidates the

findings of Cappellini and Yen's (2016) recent study, in which ethnic minority mothers were found to experience heightened and ongoing pressures as they negotiate their mothering and consumption practices between two cultures (Cappellini and Yen 2016). Extending this study, the findings suggest that some ethnic minority mothers do not simply cope with these additional responsibilities, but may see motherhood as an opportunity to challenge gender norms and socialise their children with more egalitarian gender norms. The theoretical approach used in this thesis (see Figure 6.1), rather than a focus on liminality, enabled the thesis to make significant contributions to our understanding of how non-majority consumers are positioned differently to negotiate new identities and challenge gender norms, both during and beyond the transition to motherhood.

### **7.3.2 Research on South Asian women's negotiation of new gender identities**

This research extends studies of ethnicity and gender (c.f. Ahmad 2001; Bagguley and Hussain 2016; Ramji 2008; Shah et al. 2010) that examine South Asian women's negotiations of university and marriage, by suggesting that mothering and consumption practices are important sites for negotiating new gender identities and pushing the boundaries of gender norms. The thesis has shown how participants' previous negotiations shaped their trajectories to motherhood, positing that (South Asian) women's ability to develop a reflexive habitus and mobilise forms of capital shapes how they negotiate their gender identities on becoming a mother. Extending the work of Bagguley and Hussain (2016), the findings suggest that despite negotiating new gender identities as independent women, such reflexivity was not always apparent when participants started a family. Typically, Muslim participants did not choose to delay the timing of their pregnancy, and many found motherhood as a challenge to their identity as independent women. Those who chose to delay starting a family seemed better able to incorporate motherhood into their

gender identities, although all participants had to learn to find a balance between their identity as independent women and good mothers, much like many mothers (Boyd 2002; Shelton and Johnson 2006).

Rather than focussing on participants' acculturation between British and South Asian cultures (Lindridge and Hogg 2006), the research foregrounds how participants develop a reflexive habitus, in which they negotiate gender norms (such as intensive motherhood) that operate across multiple fields. Doing so enabled the thesis to extend post-assimilationist consumer research (Lindridge and Hogg 2006; Lindridge et al. 2004) in which South Asian mothers are portrayed as 'cultural gatekeepers' of South Asian cultural values and family hierarchies. Whereas an acculturation approach may risk portraying participants' negotiation of gender norms as becoming westernised or assimilated to British culture, the thesis contributes an effective means of understanding how participants' trajectories to motherhood and reflexive habitus shape how they negotiate new gender identities through mothering and consumption practices.

Finally, while the thesis contributes insight into ethnic minority mothers' experiences of socialising their children, the research also has implications for the study of motherhood beyond the ethnic minority context. By considering participants' reflexive habitus and trajectories to motherhood, the findings extends our understanding of a how (all) mothers act as 'generational pivots' who are 'powerful transmitters of culture trans-generationally' (Hollway 2010:142). The research suggests that there is much to be learnt about how women are positioned differently to negotiate new gender identities on becoming mothers. The thesis contributes a framework for examining the complex ways in which women's trajectories to motherhood, reflexive habitus and position across multiple fields shapes how they socialise their children.

## **7.4 Marketing implications**

There are several implications for marketing practitioners that arise from this thesis. A major implication for marketers of baby products and services surrounds the timing of some South Asian women's consumption during the transition to motherhood. Whilst recognising that South Asian mothers living in the UK are a heterogeneous group, most women in this study chose to reproduce South Asian cultural practices surrounding birth. Since some South Asian women may opt to remain indoors for several weeks or months after birth, marketers of baby products could target these women using online shopping and other online social media.

Gift-giving was a key way in which participants consumed baby and nursery products during the transition to motherhood. Some participants reflected that they had received duplicate gifts, e.g. bouncers, cribs. Marketers might consider targeting South Asian women in relation to these gift-giving purchase behaviours, for example, by promoting the use of baby gift lists/registers. These registers are often used by mothers in the US, and could be introduced as a means to avoid such duplication (Afflerback et al. 2014). However, such marketing activities may increase South Asian mothers' involvement in purchasing baby products. In doing so, marketers should recognise that consumption-induced liminality may be more likely to occur (as per the Voice Group 2010a), especially if these women found themselves more overwhelmed by consumption choices, much like their white middle-class counterparts.

Mobile technologies and web-based messaging apps (e.g. Whatsapp) played a significant role in participants' development of support networks. It is important that such services remain free to use, since the research showed that women with low levels of capital used these services to develop their support networks. Marketers of online services for mothers (e.g. Mumsnet, Netmums) could reach (South Asian) mothers by sponsoring or advertising



their support services in such apps. They could also develop innovative apps that combine advice with local support networks and group-messaging services, which may improve mothers' ability to accrue and convert social capital. Social marketing campaigns by parenting groups (e.g. National Childbirth Trust) could encourage all mothers to develop informal networks, using group messaging to share sources of advice, information and support.

A key finding of this research was that women in this study were seeking to encourage their husbands to play a more active, shared role in parenting. Marketers could help to engender these changes, by targeting baby and children's products at both husbands and wives, in ways that seek to challenge traditional gender norms. For example, adverts that feature more involved fathers could incorporate more South Asian men. Where marketers feature or target South Asian mothers, they could consider the role of wider family hierarchies in shaping consumption practices. Similarly, products and services relating to domestic and caring responsibilities, feeding the family, and childcare could portray a more diverse view of family life, as well as a shift towards more egalitarian gender norms.

On a macro-level, marketers could play an influential role in helping to break down wider cultural stereotypes of young South Asian women and mothers. Major socio-political shifts within the UK are challenging the values of diversity and multiculturalism, most notably, Brexit. However, there is some evidence of marketers seeking to promote diversity and challenge stereotypes (Kipnis and Cui forthcoming), for example H&M's advertising campaign with women of different ethnicities (Mahdawi 2016). Against this backdrop, marketers could seek to challenge stereotypical view of South Asian women as docile and destined to become young housewives and full-time mothers (Bagguley and Hussain 2016).

Instead, marketers could portray South Asian women as able to become both independent women and good mothers in any relevant marketing communications.

Similarly, media providers and producers can play a powerful role in both reproducing and changing wider public perceptions of South Asian women. Recent examples include programmes such as *Desi Rascals* (Sky TV), *Extremely British Muslims* (Channel 4), *Murdered by My Father* (BBC) and *Muslims Like Us* (BBC). Although they often aim to challenge stereotypes and raise awareness of issues affecting South Asian people living in the UK, they tend to focus on British Muslims. One might question the extent to which these programmes feature those with strong (if different) views, as they simultaneously seek to entertain audiences. Actors including Meera Syal (Jackson 2017) and Thandi Newton (Ling 2017) have recently critiqued the British media for limited portrayals of Black and South Asian women. More could be done to ensure that the heterogeneous experiences of South Asian (working) mothers (and fathers) are portrayed in the media.

## **7.5 Policy implications**

This thesis raises a number of implications for public policy. Most participants recognised that midwives and other health professionals were aware of the South Asian tradition of new mothers staying with their mother's after birth. However, some women referred to an example of a flippant comment made by a midwife that made a lasting impression on their confidence. For example, when Nabeela forgot to bring nappies to hospital, the midwife joked 'did you realise you were having a baby?' This comment, only hours after birth, greatly affected her confidence as a new mother. Similarly, Anita recalled her midwife making a comment about how much harder single women must find new motherhood, suggesting that, as a South Asian woman, she 'had it easy', as she was staying at her mother's house. Anita reflects that this further added to her difficulties in adapting to motherhood. In Anita's case,

although she had high levels of cultural capital, she had a limited support network (having no sisters) and a less supportive family hierarchy, which intensified her struggle to manage conflicting advice. Healthcare professionals could offer more supportive care if they had an awareness of the conflicting advice that many South Asian mothers receive, and were mindful that family hierarchies and cultural practices may not always simply equate to more support.

Informal support networks were found to be a valuable source of social capital. Public health professionals and (South Asian) community/women's groups could seek to encourage South Asian mothers to develop informal groups to share their experiences (both good and bad) of motherhood. Such groups could also transmit useful information to help them consider their return/entry to work, for example the availability of free/paid childcare, options regarding maternity pay and parental leave. The use of free apps, particularly group-messaging apps, like Whatsapp, could be encouraged as an effective means of transmitting information and potentially developing social capital.

Increases in the amount of free childcare may also benefit South Asian women as they return to work. Yet even those with high-levels of cultural capital may need guidance in knowing how to access different forms childcare, to help them develop a blend that works for their situation. For example, Naeema felt she lacked an awareness as she made her childcare choice, as she had placed her child in a 'Sure Start'<sup>14</sup> nursery, but would have preferred to have used a private childcare provider. More affordable childcare would likely encourage

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<sup>14</sup> Sure Start is a UK government programme that provides support services for parents and children under 4 years. Sure Start centres also provide early learning and day-care provision.

South Asian women to enter the workforce. However, some may find they need to justify their choice to family members, as did Nabeela and Namra.

Recent changes have been made within public policy to encourage more gender equality for working parents, most notably the recent introduction of Shared Parental Leave (SPL) in spring 2015. At that time, data collection for this study was entering the final stages, and the majority of participants were not eligible to pursue such leave. However, promoting policies such as SPL or flexible working practices to South Asian women could help these women to negotiate a more equitable division of parenting and domestic responsibilities.

The public and third sector should continue to campaign against and raise awareness of negative gender stereotypes, by featuring (South Asian) couples with a shared approach to parenting and housework, for example. This approach is reflected in the UN initiative ‘HeForShe’, which promotes gender equality. Similarly, in the UK, more widespread support could be given to initiatives such as the Muslim Women’s Network UK’s<sup>15</sup> #AndMuslim campaign. The campaign challenges negative stereotypes of Muslim women by raising awareness of the achievements and contributions of Muslim women. The campaign emphasises how these women are GPs, bikers, boxers, midwives and engineers, as well as Muslims.

Finally, the thesis reinforces the need to encourage and support South Asian women to reflect on how they can become both an independent women and a good mother. Every effort ought to be ensure continued access to higher education and careers for South Asian women. Given the recent increases in tuition fees and reductions in grants (e.g. Educational Maintenance

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<sup>15</sup> Muslim Women’s Network UK (MWNUK) is a national Muslim women’s organisation and charity that seeks ‘to improve the social justice and equality for Muslim women and girls’ (MWNUK website 2017).

Allowance), access to higher education could potentially become more difficult to negotiate (Franceschelli 2011). Continued support to pursue education and work may be particularly important for women who are going through divorce, and, where appropriate, those who have encountered forced marriage or domestic violence. In light of ongoing austerity in the public sector, the role of the third sector (e.g. charities such as MWNUK) may be an invaluable resource for enabling these women to negotiate new gender identities and challenge gender norms.

## **7.6 Limitations and areas for future research**

Although the thesis has offered significant insights into the experiences of South Asian women as they become mothers, and the role that consumption plays, there are some limitations of the study and areas of future research which are now considered.

The focus of this thesis was on the role of consumption in the performative negotiation of gender identity. The thesis has shown how South Asian are reflexively negotiating gender norms that are both deeply entrenched, yet dynamic and shifting, at the intersection of multiple overlapping fields. In contrast, existing consumer research on ethnic minority consumers tends to use the lens of acculturation (as discussed in section 2.4.1). Yet a focus on acculturation is noticeably absent in recent sociological research on South Asian women's negotiations of gender norms and higher education (see sections 2.4.2; 2.4.3). Notwithstanding the contributions that thesis has offered, it is recognised that an acculturation lens may offer different insights that could extend the findings of this thesis.

As discussed in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3), the research sample largely comprised second-generation Muslim women. It is recognised that the findings of this study are likely to reflect the composition of the research sample (see section 3.6.2 for further reflections on

the sample). A different, or more diverse sample of South Asian women living in the UK could therefore extend the findings of this study and contribute different insights to existing research. While in-depth phenomenological interviews generated a rich dataset, it is recognised that a longitudinal research study over several years may offer more insight into changes in mothers' negotiations of domestic and caring responsibilities. Other research methods such as keeping diaries, conducting focus groups with members of informal support networks, or netnographic studies that examine the dynamics of mothers' group-based messaging could offer further insight into mothers' consumption associated with support networks.

The thesis has identified the consumption of contraception as a potential avenue for extending the findings of this study. Such research may help to understand the extent to which South Asian women are challenging gender norms by delaying motherhood. In order to achieve a more diverse sample, future research on contraception consumption might benefit from purposive recruitment via public services (e.g. family planning and healthcare providers), which was beyond the scope and aims of this thesis.

Future research could examine the experiences of South Asian women positioned within more diverse family forms. A wider variety of South Asian family forms might focus on interfaith families, single or non-married mothers, or same-sex couples. Although this study did include some women with blended families (i.e. post-divorce), and some who had transnational and/or interfaith marriages, purposively recruiting mothers from these families was beyond the reach of this thesis. However, the findings suggest that there is much diversity in South Asian family hierarchies, and examining the experiences of mothers (and other family members) may help to illuminate how South Asian mothers (and families) are both reproducing and challenging gender norms in Britain today.

This thesis has focused primarily on how South Asian women's consumption practices, particularly their parenting and domestic responsibilities, within the family field. Future research could consider South Asian women's experiences of negotiating their identities as mothers within other key fields, such as the work field. While such a focus may be of less interest to consumer researchers, there is increasing academic interest in the experiences of 'mumpreneurs' (Duberley and Carrigan 2012) as well as the interplay between religion and entrepreneurship (Essers and Benschop 2009). Further research on how working South Asian mothers negotiate new identities in the workplace could extend this thesis and make a valuable contribution to this growing body of literature.

Finally, although the thesis foregrounds the experiences of South Asian mothers, future research could examine experiences of South Asian fatherhood, and the role of consumption in shaping fathers' negotiations of new gender identities. Interviewing both parents (c.f. Lindridge et al. forthcoming), or focussing on fathers alone (Miller 2010), may offer a valuable contribution to consumer research on gender and ethnic minority consumers. Alternatively, there is scope to consider how parenthood shapes the experiences of different ethnic minority consumers, by using the theoretical approach outlined in this thesis.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A Participant Information Leaflet

### What is the aim of this research?

We are asking for your help with important research about British South Asian mothers and their experiences of having a new born child. This research is a postgraduate research project that is exploring how British South Asian mothers experience new motherhood. The research will contribute to studies of consumer behaviour, and is funded by the Open University Business School. Your views may help to improve the way information and services are provided to mothers and their family members from this ethnic background.

### What is involved?

We are interested in finding out the experiences of second-generation British South Asian mothers when they become mothers for the first time.

We are conducting interviews with mothers about their experiences during the last few months leading up to the baby's birth (if possible) and early motherhood. You may be expecting your first child or had your first child in the last 2 or 3 years. Interviews will involve a researcher talking to you. The interviews will be recorded (if you give your permission) so that we can be sure that we correctly remember everything that you tell us. We will work around you to arrange a venue and time convenient to you for the interviews.



### What will I be expected to do?

- We will interview you in the last 3-4 months of your pregnancy (if possible), then 2 or 3 times over a 12 month period.
- We may ask you to keep a diary of your experiences and ask you questions relating to this when we interview you.
- We may ask if you can take photographs of any purchases or items that are important to you during this time in your life.

### Do I have to take part?

No. We are relying on your voluntary co-operation. No one is taking part in this study who does not want to.

Even if you say yes to begin with, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you do decide to take part in the interviews, we will give you a voucher of around £25 to compensate you for your time.

### Is it confidential?

Yes. Everything that you tell the interviewer will be in confidence. No personal information will be passed to anyone outside the research team and your identity and everyone else's will be disguised through a false name. This includes staff from the Strategy and Marketing Department and the Open University Business School. Your data will be stored in strict legal accordance with the Data Protection Act (1994).

We will write a report of the study but no individual will be identifiable from the published results of the research.

### What happens now?

We will contact you to ask for your consent to take part in the research and to arrange an appointment to come and see you.

### What if I have other questions?

We would be happy to answer any questions. Please contact Katy Kerrane:

Email: [Katy.Kerrane@open.ac.uk](mailto:Katy.Kerrane@open.ac.uk)

Telephone: [REDACTED]

01908 655019



### The Research Team:

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For more information on OU  
Business School research see:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/business-school/research>



### Our responsibilities to you:

- **We ensure your safety:**

All our researchers carry photographic identification.

- **We guard your privacy:**

Your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Your contribution will be used for research purposes only. Nobody will be individually identified in the final report.

- **We respect your wishes:**

Participation in the study is voluntary and you are not obliged to answer any questions you do not wish to. You can decide not to participate at any time in the study.

- **We answer your questions:**

We will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the research.

### Research Study:

**How our identities change  
on becoming a parent**

*Exploring the experiences of  
British South Asian new  
mothers*



**This leaflet provides you with  
further information about  
the study.**

**It is also available in large  
print.**



## Appendix B Participant Consent Form



**Department of Strategy and Marketing**  
**Open University Business School**

**Consent form for persons participating in a research project**

**Project Title: How our identities change on becoming a parent**

Name of participant:

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Name of principal investigator(s): Katy Kerrane

---

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written statement in plain language to keep.
2. I understand that my participation will involve interviews, and may include recording a diary and/or allowing a researcher to observe at pre-arranged family visits and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.
3. I acknowledge that:  
  
(a) the possible effects of participating in this research have been explained to my satisfaction;

(b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;

(c) the project is for the purpose of research;

(d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

(e) I have been informed that with my consent the data generated will be stored electronically on a password protected device;

(f) if necessary any data from me will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research;

(g) I have been informed that a summary copy of the research findings will be forwarded to me, should I request this.

I consent to these interviews and diary entries being audio-taped/digitally-recorded ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**  
(please tick)

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on research findings ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**  
(please tick)

Participant signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Contact Details:**

Katy Kerrane

(Email: [Katy.Kerrane@open.ac.uk](mailto:Katy.Kerrane@open.ac.uk))

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# **Appendix C   Interview Protocol**

## **Background**

Grand tour questions (e.g. age, number of children, where they grew up, who they live with, proximity of family).

Family background and upbringing:

- Siblings
- Parents – migration?
- Family life (e.g. parents' gender roles, family structure, parental treatment of siblings, domestic division of caring and household responsibilities).

Education and Work

- Views of education: - participant, parents
- University?
- Work/career?

Marriage

- Expectations of marriage
- Timing of marriage
- Meeting or finding a husband
- Background of husband

## **Becoming a mother**

- Finding out about pregnancy/starting a family
- Expectations and experiences of pregnancy
- Preparing for motherhood and birth - Consumption?
- Sources and types of advice/support
- Cultural and/or religious practices

## **Expectations and experiences of early motherhood**

- Expectations and experiences (e.g. infant feeding, weaning, life as a new mum)
- Sources and types of advice/support
- Consumption practices e.g. using pram and other baby products

## **Returning to work**

- Reflections on maternity leave

- Deciding on return to work
- Childcare
- Managing life as a working mum (e.g. housework, parenting and work).

### **Everyday mothering practices**

- Can you describe your approach to bringing up your children?
- What is your daily life as a mum like?
- What role does your husband play?
- What role do wider family members play?

### **Reflections on motherhood**

- What does being a mum entail?
- How did/ do you feel about being a mum? Have your feelings changed?
- How has becoming a mum shaped your life?

### **Ethnicity and Religion**

- How would you define your identity?
  - Ethnicity?
  - Religion?
  - Generation?
  - Or any other way you think about yourself?
- Has becoming a mum changed this?
- How does this shape how you bring up your children?



## Appendix D Participant Synopses

This appendix offers a brief synopsis of each participant. Further information can be found in Table 3.2, which provides a summary of relevant information that helps to contextualise the research findings, such as participants' education level, employment, living arrangements.

<b>Participant (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Synopsis</b>
<b><i>Jasvinder</i></b>	Jasvinder is a second-generation mother of Indian origin; she was raised as Sikh but is now practising Hinduism. She lives has one child (aged 4 months) and they with her husband, who is also Hindu. Her parents live in close proximity; Jasvinder had moved away to study and work but has since moved to be nearer to her parents. Jasvinder is in her early thirties and is educated to post-graduate level. She is not currently working but plans to continue to develop her career in the near future.
<b><i>Zahara</i></b>	Zahara is a second-generation Indian heritage woman. She is a Muslim, though she describes her religious belief as 'in-between'. She currently lives with her husband, their 9 month old daughter, her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. She is currently on maternity leave from work, and is returning to work very soon. She is also expecting her second child. She is educated to college level and works as a low-skilled public sector worker. She is planning to return to work, but is reducing from full-time to part-time.
<b><i>Raveena</i></b>	Raveena is a Sikh woman in her late twenties and has one child, aged two months. She hails from India and identifies herself as third-generation. Raveena had moved away to study (to postgraduate level), but afterwards she and her husband moved to be near both sets of parents. She now lives with her husband and his parents. Her parents also live in close proximity. She is not currently working but plans to continue her career in the near future.
<b><i>Chanda</i></b>	Chanda is a British-born Hindu women in her mid-thirties, and is of Indian heritage, although her mother had lived in Uganda. She has a two year old and is expecting her second child. She is educated to graduate level and is currently studying part-time for a professional qualification, as well as working. She grew up with her brother and parents, with some family members living nearby. Chanda now lives with her husband and child, while her parents live very nearby.

<b><i>Nabeela</i></b>	Nabeela is a second-generation Muslim woman of Indian heritage. She is in her early thirties and has a 19 month old child. She is the eldest of five sisters and grew up in a 'joint family' home, with their parents and paternal grandparents. Nabeela went to university and now works part-time in a professional job. She lives with her husband and daughter, having moved out from her parents-in-law during her pregnancy. Her parents and sisters live nearby.
<b><i>Parminder</i></b>	Parminder is a first-generation Indian woman in her mid-thirties. She came to the UK to study full-time for a postgraduate degree, with her husband and their 4 year old child. Before moving to the UK, she and her husband had chosen not to live and work near to either sets of parents. They do not have any family living in the UK. Parminder was raised as a Hindu but describes herself as not particularly religious, while her husband is Christian.
<b><i>Anita</i></b>	Anita is a British-born Muslim woman of Pakistani heritage; her mother was born in the UK, raised in Pakistan and her parents came to the UK when they married. She is in her early thirties and has an 18 month old daughter. They live with her husband, who is of Indian heritage and is also Muslim. She has three younger brothers and grew up in a 'joint family' home. Anita is educated to postgraduate level and works full-time. Her mother and parents-in-law live in close proximity.
<b><i>Safiya</i></b>	Safiya is a first-generation Muslim woman of Pakistani heritage. She migrated with her husband, as he moved to the UK to study for a post-graduate degree. She was expecting their first child when she arrived in the UK, and they have a two children: a 2 year old and 10 month old. Safiya is educated to degree level and worked professionally until she married. She had lived with her parents-in-law until she moved to the UK.
<b><i>Madina</i></b>	Madina describes herself as a second-generation Asian heritage Muslim woman, whose parents are from East Africa but originate from India and Pakistan. She is in her mid-thirties and lives with her husband and their new baby. Her parents, brother and sister, and parents-in-law live close by. She has a 3 month old daughter and is educated to degree level.
<b><i>Rafeeqa</i></b>	Rafeeqa is a second-generation Indian heritage mother of 18 month-old twins. She is a Muslim in her late 20s and lives with her husband and children. Her parents and five of her sisters live very close by. Rafeeqa is educated to degree level and was working full-time until she had her children, however she works part-time now.

<b><i>Shaheera</i></b>	Shaheera is a second-generation Indian Muslim woman with two children, aged 2 years and 5 months. She lives with her husband, children and her parents-in-law. She is one of six sisters, though she moved away from her parents and sisters when she got married. She is educated to degree level and held a professional job until she became a mother.
<b><i>Hashini</i></b>	Hashini is a first-generation Sri-Lankan heritage woman in her late twenties, who moved to the UK a year ago. She is educated to post-graduate level, working as a business professional, and moved to the UK with her husband as he is pursuing further study in the UK. At the time of interview, she was 5 months pregnant with her first child. She plans to return to Sri-Lanka for the birth of their baby, and then return to the UK to pursue her career in the near future.
<b><i>Ashira</i></b>	Ashira describes herself as a third-generation Muslim woman of Pakistani heritage. She is educated to post-graduate level and is in her early 30s. She lives with her husband and their 3 year old child. She is one of five children and they live in close proximity to her parents, siblings and several in-laws. Ashira works full-time in a professional job.
<b><i>Mahira</i></b>	Mahira regards herself as second-generation, as she came to the UK when she was 5 years old, with her parents. She is educated to secondary school level. She has an 11 year old daughter from her first marriage, and is 6 months pregnant with her second baby, having recently remarried. She plans to return to work and possibly pursue further education in the near future. She and her husband live close to her parents.
<b><i>Namra</i></b>	A second-generation Indian heritage woman, Namra is in her early forties. She is Muslim and is married, with three children, aged 12, 9 and 4 years old. She is one of four children but she moved away from her family when she got married. Initially she moved into her husband's mother's house, before they moved to the other side of the town. Namra is educated to college level and works part-time.
<b><i>Marjana</i></b>	Marjana is a second-generation Pakistani heritage Muslim woman with four children: an 11 year old, a 4 year old, a 2 year old and a 2 month old. She lives with her second husband – her first child is from her first marriage and the subsequent children are from her second husband. She lives near to her parents and is educated to college level. She works part-time in her husband's small business.
<b><i>Fareeda</i></b>	A second-generation Muslim woman of Indian descent, Fareeda has three children: a 15 year old, a 10 year old and a 13 month old. She is in her

	early forties and lives with her husband and their children. Fareeda is educated to college level and works part-time. She is one of four siblings, two older sisters and one younger brother, and lives in close proximity to her mother and most of her siblings.
<b><i>Ameena</i></b>	Ameena is a second-generation Indian heritage Muslim woman with four children: twins aged 9, a 5 year old and an 18 month old. She is in her mid-thirties and lives with her husband and their children. She is educated to degree level and currently works full-time from home. She is one of seven siblings, with her parents and most of her siblings living close by.
<b><i>Naeema</i></b>	As a second-generation Pakistani heritage Muslim woman, Naeema is in her early thirties and has a 7 year old child. She is educated to degree level and works part-time. She has four brothers (3 elder, one younger). She lives near to her parents and some of her siblings. Initially she and her husband lived with her parents, but they later moved to live in their own house, whilst living near to her parents.
<b><i>Jameela</i></b>	Jameela is in her late thirties, and is a second-generation Muslim woman of Indian heritage. She was born in India and migrated when she was around 3 years old. She has two children: a 7 year old and a 2 year old. Jameela is one of six children, and lives in close proximity to her parents and most of her siblings. She is educated to postgraduate level and works full-time.
<b><i>Fatima</i></b>	Fatima hails from Pakistan and is a second-generation Muslim woman. She is in her mid-thirties and has two children: a 10 year old and a 1 year old. She lives with her husband and their children. Fatima has six siblings who mostly live locally, while her mother lives in very close proximity. She is educated to degree level, although she married before she decided to go to university. She now works full-time.
<b><i>Asma</i></b>	As a first-generation Pakistani Muslim woman, Asma moved to the UK three years ago with her husband who was studying for a postgraduate degree. She is the eldest of six children. She is educated to degree level, but she had to pause her studies when she got married. She has two children aged 4 years and 17 months. Since coming to the UK, Asma has also been studying alongside looking after her children. She plans to find part-time work soon, once her youngest can attend state-funded nursery.
<b><i>Samia</i></b>	Samia is in her late thirties and is a second-generation Muslim woman of Pakistani heritage. She lives with her husband and their child, aged 12 years, although Samia is expecting her second child. She is the eldest of

	three siblings and lives near to her mother. She is educated to degree level and works full-time.
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## **Appendix E    List of codes**

### **Family**

#### ***Participants' upbringing***

Gender roles – participants' mother  
Gender roles – participants' father  
Gender roles – daughter (i.e. participant and any sisters)  
Gender roles – son (i.e. participants' brothers)  
Grandparents/extended family gender roles  
Domestic division of labour  
Family hierarchy  
Sibling hierarchy  
Parents/Grandparents' migration stories  
Co-habiting with extended family  
Proximity/frequency of visits from extended family  
Differential treatment of siblings  
Family position within the community/honour  
  
Participants' reflections: compromise/sacrifice identity  
Participants' reflections: feeling judged by family members  
Participants' reflections: of their/ their mother's experiences  
Participants' reflections: changes in parents' view of gender norms  
Participants' reflections: differentiating/challenging gender norms across generations

#### ***Participant's current family context***

Participant's gender roles  
Husband's gender roles  
Living with extended family  
Proximity of participant's family  
Proximity of husband's family  
Participant's position within family hierarchies  
Domestic division of labour/caring responsibilities: husband's involvement  
Domestic division of labour/caring responsibilities: parents/in-laws' involvement  
Childcare provided by family  
Childcare provided by the market

### **Education and work**

Mother's views of higher education for daughters  
Father's views of higher education for daughters  
Grandparents'/extended family members' views of higher education  
Changing views regarding South Asian women's education  
Subject choice  
Location  
Living/socialising arrangements  
Contradictions and compromises  
Role-models: elder siblings  
Role-models: educated family members

Differentiating oneself from others peers/female family members

Education and work as a means to become independent

Education as part of religious identity

Being independent as a key part of identity

Delaying/negotiating marriage

Delaying/negotiating starting a family

Motherhood as a loss of independence

Pressure to become a full-time mother

Guilt at becoming a working mother

Reasons to return to work/study

Becoming an independent woman and a good mother

Negotiating domestic/caring responsibilities and work: husbands' involvement

Negotiating domestic/caring responsibilities and work: wider family members' involvement

### **Marriage and starting a family**

Participant's expectations of marriage

Parents' expectations of their daughter's marriage

Finding a husband

A 'suitable' choice of husband

Risks of not marrying a 'suitable' husband

Family approval of husband

Arranged marriage

Introductions

Love marriage

Marriages within the wider family

Transnational marriages

Forced marriage

Experiences of divorce

Experiences of domestic abuse

Reflecting on experiences: developing new understandings of culture and religion

Remarrying: finding a 'suitable' husband

Participant's expectations of starting a family

Husband's expectations of starting a family

Parents' expectations for their daughters to start a family

Wider family/community expectations to start a family

Delaying/negotiating starting a family

Becoming pregnant quickly and/or unexpectedly

Motherhood as threat to/loss of independence

### **Good mothering and consumption practices:**

#### ***Transition to motherhood***

Timing of purchasing baby products  
Participant does not feel the need to nest/purchase beforehand  
Remaining indoors after birth  
Support from female family members after birth  
Staying at mother's house after birth  
Judging other mothers for taking baby out too soon  
Received many/large items as gifts  
Involvement in purchases

Formal/medical sources of expert advice  
High status of advice from female family members  
Advice from other mothers: friends/colleagues  
Participant's position within the family hierarchy  
Competing/conflicting advice  
Generational/contextual differences in familial advice  
Food consumption during pregnancy  
Infant feeding/weaning  
Providing toys and structuring activities/time spent with baby/child

Gap between expert advice/expectations and experiences  
Guilt  
Feeling judged  
Need for time for oneself  
Questioning different forms of advice  
Developing support networks  
Being flexible/developing a blend of expert advice  
Judging/offering advice to others  
Demonstrating child's development

### ***Everyday mothering practices***

Self-sacrificing and 'being there' for your child  
Ensuring child's development  
Domestic division of labour: negotiating with husband  
Domestic division of labour: negotiating with parents/in-laws  
Childcare provided by family  
Formal childcare  
Transmitting cultural and religious heritage  
Socialising children with gender norms  
Labour and resource intensive  
Minimising risk for child  
Feeling judged  
Reflecting on experiences: comparing with their upbringing/ mother's experiences

## **Culture and religion**

### ***Cultural practices surrounding birth***

Remaining indoors  
Staying at mothers' house  
Support from female family members



Extensive gift-giving  
Other practices

***Transmission of cultural and religious heritage***

Reflecting on experiences: understanding of culture  
Reflecting on experiences: understanding of religion  
Reflecting on experiences: gender norms  
Language  
Food  
Clothing  
Other cultural/religious practices  
Connections with older generations  
Connections with wider community  
Choice rather than duty  
A parenting resource  
Transmission of gender norms  
Role of participants  
Role of husbands  
Role of grandparents/extended family  
Role of community/places of worship  
Participants' position within the family hierarchy  
Availability of support networks  
Mothers as ultimately responsible